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AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL

VOL. I.

LONDON : PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL

BY THE

COUNTESS M. VON BOTHMER

AUTHOR OF 'GERMAN HOME LIFE' ETC.

'Beware the Ides of March !

'He is a dreamer ; let us leave him : Pass !'

SHAKESPEARE

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1883

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OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.



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Ms. Ray 12 Feb. 53
6 Nov. 51 Hester 3v.
Rev. Ray

AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL.



CHAPTER I.

THE FOUNTAIN OF THE PORTICO.

PEOPLE said they were American. Other people said they were English; but, then, those who said so were French, or German, or Russian, to whom there is no appreciable difference between the denizens of the Old and the New Worlds.

To Continental outsiders it seems beyond expression strange that an Englishman should resent being taken for an American, and *vice versâ*. ‘You are all one family,’ they say; ‘why should the mother disclaim her daughter because mademoiselle has other manners, other views of life, than obtained when madame was . . . before she had made monsieur the happiest man in the universe?’

(Here the hand is laid gently on the diaphragm, slightly to the left of the central waistcoat button, and madame is supposed to utter little soft deprecating shrieks of delight at the elegance of the compliment, at the exquisite grace of the complimenter.) ‘Or why should the daughter show impatience of maternal prejudices, so called, and boast of her own superiority, since the very qualities she prizes, and upon which she plumes herself, are due to the facts of her birth and parentage? You others, you English, you are eccentric even in the life of the family; for one family you are, and one you remain; and, split straws as you may, upon outsiders you make precisely one and the same impression.’

‘Yes; and the worst of it is,’ a young fellow was saying to a brother Oxonian on whom he had pounced, a godsend in this weary waste of (German) waters, ‘they are all so awfully bumptious! What? “*I don’t understand the language, so how do I know?*” Why, don’t they understand mine, and yours—beg pardon, old fellow, I don’t mean to say they’d know your brogue, you know—and his, and hers, and its, and theirs, and ours? They’re about the polyglottiest “cusses” out; and as to “side”

—side isn't in it. You wait until you've taken off the stains of travel, and unpacked your top-hat and patent leathers, and I'll take you to where the band plays. *Come to see your aunt and uncle?* Lucky fellow! I've been six weeks stewing in this steam-kettle, simmering, and—— Well, you have only to look at me to see I'm literally "done to rags." The climate and the cooking have made such inroads upon my person and constitution; and yet my mother, such is the utter and brutal selfishness of the modern parent, my mother don't see it, and won't commit herself to saying when her "cure" will be over. *Where are we?* Oh! we are staying at the "*Rose*." But don't come there, for the cook is in league with the doctors, and we are fed on husks, and grease, and boiled milk adulterated in various economical forms. Go to the "*Quatre Saisons*," where they have a French *chef*. And I will come round and fetch you in half an hour.'

Fitzgerald, who had scarcely uttered a word, and only asked one or two questions, was slightly surprised to be addressed thus familiarly by Hudson, a man neither of his year nor of his college at Oxford. He had met this ingenuous and garrulous youth at 'a wine' or

two on the banks of the Isis, and had heard him once make an egregious fool of himself at the Debating Club; but these little episodes dated a good way back in his natural history, and Oxonian etiquette demanded a more respectful and distant style of approach from a junior to a 'don'; so Fitzgerald told himself with a grim smile, as he tried to dip his sun-burned countenance into a pudding-basin full of water, and only contrived in his sputterings to slop the precious element over the white-draped washing-stand, and waste it on the bare boards of his uncarpeted room. Nevertheless, a finer, cleaner, brighter specimen of a well-bred young Englishman had seldom stepped out of the classic portico of the '*Quatre Saisons*,' at Sprudelheim, than Mr. Gerald Fitzgerald, in what Hudson irreverently called his 'second-best Sunday-go-to-meeting-togs, Lincoln and B., and patent-agonies,' when, on that bright July evening, destiny sent him, innocently rejoicing, on his way.

For a few minutes, after meeting the renovated traveller, the irrepressible Hudson, awed by reminiscent traditions of the formulæ of university etiquette, restrained the unruly member in accordance with the Pauline pre-

cept ; but after the lapse of ninety odd seconds, his overwrought feelings proved too much for him, and, without preface or preamble, he again broke out with his interrupted confidences :—

‘ They gave you a sugar-basin to wash in, I suppose ? Fancy, my mother is so blindly partial that she says it is preposterous to complain of domestic washing arrangements, when there are such splendid public baths for everyone, and to spare. By the way, don’t put anything into the drawers if you ever expect to get your clothes out again. There is a key which fits every chest of drawers in Sprudelheim, and you have to turn it round to some particular angle, invented for the benefit of the natives, and pull vehemently. The chest wobbles about, and the drawers rattle, but they don’t move. There are no shutters to the windows, so there is no night. At five o’clock the water-drinking begins. The poor wretches drink from five till seven, or from six till eight. They walk up and down in appalling *déshabillé*, telling each other their various complaints in the most unvarnished fashion, and boasting of how many “ beakers ” they have arrived, by dint of practice, at swallowing. All the time the band plays—nothing can be done without the braying

of brass, in Germany. "Music hath power to soothe the savage soul," and to soften the horrors (at any rate to the native) of the Sprudelheimer "Kur." After coffee and rolls—no butter—the tormented are allowed to rest. Then the "tubbing" begins. Then *table d'hôte*, which the natives call *Mittagessen*, that is "mid-day-feed," you know; it'll remind you of all sorts of things—it does me: of the parable about the Prodigal Son; of the Zoo; of a railway buffet, and the express starting in a minute and a half, and the waiter gone to get change for a half-sovereign, and your half-pint of claret waiting to get uncorked, and the bell ringing, and no chance of another meal for ten hours. I'm sick of people saying they're frightened when the Germans begin to swallow their knives. Why should they be frightened at their juggling tricks? I dare say I'm a brute, but people have been talking about it so long that I wish they *would* swallow them once for all, or cut their tongues out, or choke whilst they're drinking the gravy, or spluttering over the lumps of bread they wipe up the grease with——'

'You seem very irate,' said Fitzgerald, smiling on the splenetic youth and his confidences.

‘Wait until you have had as much of it as I have,’ Hudson went on. ‘It’s not *that* I care for. It’s their conceit, their priggishness, the way they look over a fellow’s head, the idea they’ve got that they’ve done what no one else ever did before. But *you’ll* see ;’ and the angry but garrulous young man rushed on, displaying an energy more in accordance with his exasperated feelings than in harmony with the delicious warmth and stillness of a July evening, specially made for loitering.

All their surroundings were fresh, bright, and radiant. The long avenue through which they were passing was lit up with the golden glory of the sun’s declining rays. The foliage looked as bright and freshly green as if June were still on the threshold. The trunks of the trees, barred with sunset gold, bordered the leafy aisles like gilded columns ; the carefully tended flower-beds, on the carefully kept lawns to the right, were fragrant with bloom ; not a faded blossom or withered leaf to be seen. German nursemaids, with quaint, mummified babies swathed in odd-looking cotton-mantles, sauntered to and fro, carrying closed umbrellas and parasols ; the awkward peasant figures, and thick coils of plaited hair stuck through with

arrows, or spears, or huge-headed pins, or partly covered by embroidered velvet caps, taken with the parasols, suggested an odd sense of incongruity. Their large feet, encased in coarse white knitted stockings and thick roughly-made shoes, their frilled cotton cloaks, and the rolling uncouthness of their gait, caused one involuntarily to look at them again and again, wondering whether, though obviously young, they could ever have moved lightly and swiftly, and why they should have such fine hair and such horrible teeth, such huge waists and enormous feet, were so generally "dowdy," and yet wore head-dresses so smart and picturesque.

Children were playing in the dust of the *ALLÉE*; calling to each other in little shrill guttural voices, softly rasping the evening air, with a sense of gently-jarring surprise. Near some of the seats toys, of strictly German build, strewed the ground.

'That's the *Kursaal*,' Hudson said, stopping suddenly in the midst of his jeremiads to point out a large building at the end of the avenue. 'In old days, before Prince Bismarck had turned puritan, "purged, left sack, and lived cleanly," that was where the gambling went on. They gambol still, but it's spelt

differently. And I, for one, don't care to go and look on at a set of Prussians dancing with all the prettiest English girls in the place. I don't go near their "Balls," on principle, and I hope you won't either. Americans toady the Germans in a sickening way. I think we ought to make a stand, you know. At any rate that's where I draw the line.'

'I don't know,' Fitzgerald said, smiling; 'I'm not so tremendously in earnest as you are. I'm older, you see, and have grown lazy and apathetic. I have no particular principles about dancing, or about anything else, that I'm aware of. Only, as a general rule, I think it a mistake to set oneself up at Rome against the Romans.'

'Well, you will see,' Hudson answered. 'Come round this way and we can have a look at the people I was telling you about. They know lots of Germans, but I will show them to you from a distance. Then you can judge. I am certain they are English—certain. But of course foreigners *never* know a Yankee from a John Bull, and as Americans are popular and we aren't over here, my unknown friends are supposed to have an oil or shoddy background.'

The two young men crossed a low colonnade. In the centre of a large grass plot a fountain was playing. On the opposite side of the road a public square, formed by the theatres and three hotels, made a pleasant quadrangle. At the end of the grass plot, passing beneath a Grecian portico, you entered the Kursaal; some classical subjects painted in fresco above the pillars gave a pleasant touch of colour. The sound of the water splashing and tinkling in the marble basin fell refreshingly on the ear. It seemed to soothe Fitzgerald in a peculiar manner, as he mentally contrasted it with the late snorting and puffing of locomotives and steamboats, the shaking and grinding of railway carriages and omnibuses which he had endured. The surrounding calm suggested a haven, even though a strange one, reached at last, where one could stretch one's legs, get up when one chose, make a due selection of raiment, and generally indulge in the *far niente* that never seems so agreeable as after days of hurried travel.

He paused a moment to look at the feathery foam of the fountain falling in prismatic colours; to take in the long sweep of

green lawn, pillared portico, marble column, and frescoed pediment, in their classic calm and severe silent beauty.

‘Like a vale in Tempe,’ he said, pointing to the distance; ‘or these might be the groves of Academe. One might fancy a group of dryads and satyrs coming out of the woods yonder; or Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates serenely discoursing wisdom to their respective disciples beneath the columns of the portico.’

But Hudson was in no mood for academical reflections. ‘Don’t let us talk “shop,” or bring those old fellows up here,’ he said irreverently. ‘I’m sure we’ve enough and to spare of their “jaw” at our own beloved Alma Mater; for my part I think the whole thing stuff.’

‘O you Goth, you Iconoclast, you outer barbarian!’

The strains of Strauss’s waltzes flew, lightly intermittent, through the elastic air, in little zephyr-like sound messages. The thin clear quality of the stringed instruments was in accord with the high columnar ripples of aerial waters whispering a hasty message, as they reached the summit, to the setting sun,

and falling in wide, wavering lines against the encircling boundary of the marble basin, with a low lapping sound, suggestive of plenitude and contentment.

The sand in this retired part of the garden, which had been carefully raked long before dawn, still bore at sun-down the marks of the artificial care intended to supplement the deficiency of the unattainable gravel of English pathways. One could see that few persons frequented this side of the Kursaal, for the footprints crossing the sand were few and far between.

‘Not even gravel, without which even your cockney has no claim to call his yard a garden,’ muttered Hudson, in intense disgust, indicating the rake-marks with a contemptuous motion. ‘Fancy raking dust, by way of making a model garden-path; and if you were to say anything, they would fly at your throat and argue your head off, to prove that a good hard gravel path was very inferior to diurnally dust-raked ways!’

‘I’m not sure that I don’t admire them for that. There is good sound philosophy in liking what you can get, when you can’t get what you like.’

‘ Ah ! well, wait. Perhaps you won’t admire them so much by-and-bye.’

And the two young men sauntered on.

As they turned the left hand corner of the building, and came to the border of the little wood that Fitzgerald mentally decided must form a pleasant retreat and screen against the sun’s scorching rays during the mid-day, an animated scene presented itself to their view.

A large lake stretched its shining waters in serpentine perspective far beyond the immediate precincts of the garden. From its centre, a beautiful fountain repeated, on a much larger scale, the rhythmic splash and ripple that had charmed Fitzgerald already in the fountain of the portico. In the immediate foreground, showing doubly white upon the double shadow of wood and water, floated two magnificent swans, swerving now to this side, now to that, arching their white necks as though in silent disdain of the admiration noisily invading their element.

In a rotunda sat the musicians, whose eloquent ‘discourses’ kept together the two or three hundred persons, some walking to and fro in pairs, some sitting at tables eating ices and drinking coffee, some silent, some in con-

verse, some throwing pastry and sweetmeats to the swans, others laughing and talking as loudly, as much *pro bono* as if they were alone in the safe seclusion of their own grounds. A motley scene indeed, taken in contrast with the solitude and silence whence the young men suddenly emerged.

Predominant, as to numbers, colour, and general importance were the Prussian military. Tightly buttoned up in resplendent uniforms, smart as buckram and belts, pipe-clay and pomade, stocks and straps, could make them, these modern sons of Mars stepped loftily along, squaring their shoulders, straightening their backs, and saluting with an angular formality that made their arms appear less like the independent limbs of a human being than the mechanical elbow-joints of a cleverly-contrived automaton. Their eyes appeared to Fitzgerald's fancy to roll portentously, and their blonde moustaches to bristle aggressively beneath the repressive wax of the military barber. Sometimes their sword-scabbards clanked resonantly against the ground; anon one hand would be laid upon the hilt, whilst the other would be raised in all the stiff precision of the regulation military salute; now and again a young dandy

would be seen picking up his sabre with an air of coquetry, as a belle does her flowing skirts, preparatory to sitting down, amongst a circle of admirers, the cynosure of neighbouring female eyes. Some of the younger exquisites hung for a second on the arm of the Fidus Achates of the moment, apparently absorbed in the communication of piquant details. Others made fleeting confidences of an evidently highly-entertaining character, separating again immediately with a burst of laughter, and the ‘No really!’ ‘Pon honour!’ of the dandiacal of every clime. An air of almost obtrusive *camaraderie* appeared to be affected by these conquering heroes; and a man would not need to be very sensitive or very quarrelsome to suspect them of a pre-conceived determination to look over his head, and to treat him, should they be accidentally brought together, absolutely in all respects as though he were not present, his entity non-existent, not to be recognised, and of no possible sort of account.

All this Fitzgerald seemed to see and take in at a glance, and in the background of his mind he was aware of a vague impression that a quarrel with one of these gentlemen must

perforce be but an empty unsatisfactory kind of thing, and better avoided. This *mem.* made a note of, he stuffed it away into the pocket-book of his mind, trusting to chance to put him on its traces should occasion call for it.

‘Look, there they are, there!’ said Hudson, taking hold of Fitzgerald’s arm, and somehow seeking to direct his vision by a strenuous pressure of that member, and a warning intonation of voice. ‘Look! to the left of the fourth orange-tree—there—a man is bowing to them. Did you ever see such antics? That’s Baron ——, but never mind his name. What does it matter? He has taken himself off, thank goodness. Now you can see them; she has a pale bonnet, I don’t know the colour; the old gentleman has not dyed his moustache to-day. I’d bet my boots that hat comes out of Bond Street. Of course the natives think that, if the people I’m telling you about are Americans, there must be money and matrimonial designs in the background. They are so beastly cautious and mercenary these Germans. We English are quite at a discount in this country. For one thing, we are all poor, nowadays. Lots of shady Britishers seeking Continental retirement, and the natives don’t

like it—small blame to them. But Americans they do like, and American girls and their fortunes too. There! now you can see them. My mater says she thinks her the loveliest girl she ever saw. What do you say? They are coming this way, by Jove! Tell me if you think they are starred or striped. I bet fifty to one they are English. They will pass close by us. Look at them both. Tell me if you think——’

‘Think—why, what nonsense!’ Fitzgerald said, colouring as he spoke. ‘These are the people I’ve come over here to see. My aunt and cousins.’

CHAPTER II.

‘ET TU, BRUTE!’

THE little party was advancing across the level green sward. Mr. Hudson's anonymous Baron had bowed himself into the background, with repeated wriggings and reverences, squaring the inevitable elbow, saluting in the high military fashion, making little, precise regulation hops to the right and to the left, almost like the figure of a comic dance, clicking his heels together every time he came into position, bringing his moustache almost on a level with his waistband, condescending, angular, emphatic. Fitzgerald noticed that there was a great deal of grass between his well-squared elbows and his judiciously-compressed waist, and as the Baron ‘trimmed his belt and his buckles, and turned out his toes,’ it indistinctly occurred to him that life was not long enough in less luxurious lands for these elaborate farewells.

Unlike his companion he was amused, tickled, with a pleasant sub-acute sense of the humorous, as though the little scene were being enacted for his entertainment.

Hudson's tongue had suddenly stopped. He was mentally rushing backwards and forwards through his confidences of the last hour or two, and trying retrospectively to recall whether he had said anything he ought not to have said about Fitzgerald's relatives. Of course, as a matter of taste, it was 'a nuisance' that he should have made these people the subject of what might, by courtesy, be called his conversation. But, then, 'How could a fellow know? Only, to be sure, everybody was related to everyone else, nowadays.' And in his perplexity a frantic desire to escape, and an ingenuous impulse of shame sent the blood flying to his face, and his tongue, suddenly paralysed, ceased to prattle forth its 'ill-considered trifles.'

Three ladies and a gentleman were advancing towards them, with that air of quiet unemotional everydayishness which belongs to the ordinary routine of life; where one expects nothing, avoids nothing, and accepts, as a matter of course, the calm of the commonplace and the event of the moment. They

were walking two and two ; they were walking arm in arm ; and they were all strangely like and yet unlike one another.

It was impossible to say where the family likeness was carried over ; where softened into doubt or strengthened into exaggeration ; by what subtle shades of transmission the colouring and expression of this young daughter of a Roman Marchese could yet bear a strong resemblance to the frankly humorous features of a cockney Irishman. How the high-bred French Canadian lady had managed to transfer something of her own essentially Gallic grace to the typical Englishwoman whose mother she was. The family strain, lost here like a brook in the underwood, emerged there into daylight again, and no one thought of examining the water-course for traces of its unbroken continuity. But this strange mixture of blood fully accounted for the differing opinions of the public as to the nationality of the family party. Mr. Owen was an Irishman in name only. His father, an absentee landlord, had, *dans le temps*, married a plain portionless young person from the Border-land. The lady had brought nothing but her thriftiness and a debateable accent as ‘tocher’ into the family with her, until

the birth of Garry, the only son and elder child. There was a girl who later on married in Ireland, and both children had been brought up in London, where the boy was taught some business or profession; but losing his father and mother whilst yet a youth, after some years of idleness and folly, had married the beautiful Léonie de Courteville, whose acquaintance he had made in Canada, when transacting business for one of the many hundreds of successful and unsuccessful companies with which he had been connected during his chequered career. Mr. Owen fell suddenly, madly, irrationally in love with this quiet, refined, not quite young, French lady. He had never seen anything like her, and he determined to marry her at any cost.

It cost little or nothing. Monsieur de Courteville, *père*, was glad to ‘settle’ his proud, silent, beautiful daughter; glad to meet with a son-in-law who did not haggle as to money, but promptly agreed to any and everything proposed for the advantage of the Courteville family. Mdlle. de Courteville was not much consulted in the matter. It was taken for granted that she could have no objection. The property would thus be kept together for

the benefit of her elder and only brother. Well-tutored French maidens understand their personal unimportance as compared with the general good of 'la famille' too well to resist parental pressure, and Léonie lifted up her large brown eyes, listening attentively to all that was said; and, if she were sacrificed, went to the altar resignedly—nay, rather with a charming grace and diffident composure peculiarly becoming under the circumstances.

If Mr. Owen had no misgivings before marriage, he was not long in discovering, after the irrevocable ceremony, the imprudence of that rash anti-nuptial haste and hurry. He had to make his bride's acquaintance; and —— he never made it. They were old people now; but, in some respects, as much strangers one to the other, as they walk across the lawns of Sprudelheim, parents and grandparents though they be, as on that triumphant day when she—Léonie—had taken him, Garry, to have and to hold, according to the old fatal, final formula, until death should them part.

But Mr. Owen was not a man either to publish the history of his own discomfiture or to weep in secret over the tragedy of mistaken haste. Outwardly he remained an attentive

husband ; perhaps more scrupulously polite and considerate to his wife than he was to anyone else in the world ; never relapsing into the free-and-easy, familiar tone common to his intercourse with his general circle ; still less warming into that condition of mutual confidence which, in happy marriages, merges the dual existence in spontaneous unity. One little daughter was born to this reasonable couple, and there the family came to an abrupt conclusion. Thenceforth Léonie lived only for her child ; and if, in the secrecy of her solitary chamber, the lonely woman poured forth her rebellious soul to God, there was no trace of such impassioned pleadings, dumb agonies, and wild regrets in her intercourse with the world. She sat hour after hour in her silent room sewing, nursing her baby, dressing it in delicate raiment, into which she put much more than the marvellous stitches so admired by her friends ; sending it out into the sunshine, welcoming it home ; muffling it in beautiful, soft, silky, woolly garments ; superintending its washing and dressing, admiring its lovely limbs and rosy hands and feet—always on the alert, never forgetful of its *bien être*. Of the pathetic emptiness of such a life, of its sense of utter failure and baffled

incompleteness, what true woman ever speaks? And Léonie made no confidences. Her child had need of her; for its sake it was her duty to live; and life for her meant solitude. By degrees her husband got more used to, if never entirely easy in, her presence. He kept his loose jests, his free and somewhat vulgar manner for times when she was not by. If people whispered that his coarse nature found amusement in a passing joke with women of an altogether different type, and it was rumoured that more than one good-looking serving-wench had been sent away for presuming too far on her master's favours and her mistress's forbearance, Mrs. Owen made no sign.

A woman who utters no complaints is never popular with her own sex. If only she would air her grievances she would place herself on an equality with other fair babblers, and her humiliation would be a tacit triumph to critics and sympathisers alike. But she can't expect sympathy if she gives herself airs. A husband's peccadilloes are the property of the female gossips of the neglected wife, and to defraud them of any of their privileges is to insure their indifference, if not their dislike.

Mr. Owen's obscure manner of life and

manifold speculations kept the little household permanently in that state of difficulty which implies midnight calculations, anxious contrivances, perennial self-denial, and perpetual misgivings and uncertainty on the part of the house-wife,

Mr. Owen was tolerably well off, met his friends at clubs and taverns, and led on the whole a jovial, roving, if not a very brilliant existence. Mrs. Owen sat at home, wondering how she should manage, reading and working, praying to God, and nursing her child. Drinking tea, and 'doing without,' so that Sunday's dinner might have attractive features for the lord and master, studying fresh economies and possible retrenchments, was the life she led, and it was supposed to be good enough for her. Was she not a good woman (apart from her haughtiness of disposition, and a certain high temper, apt, if not judiciously curbed, to strain at camels), and what did any good woman want more than a baby, and buttons to sew on to her husband's shirts? Well-regulated women never require equal companionship, interchange of ideas, sympathy, consideration, and love, if the husband withhold these boons. Thus, if at times the proud strong nature of the woman,

the rich reserve of generous emotions, rose up in conscious antagonism to the stagnation of her existence, and fought and struggled passionately in her pure breast for the mastery, who was any the wiser? She smote her fair bosom in self-accusing penitence, ate out her heart in solitude, and went on from day to day, from year to year, along the straight unquestioned path of duty.

When Hero was sixteen and Léonie forty-four, the paper-mills, coffee-plantations, patent carriage-lamps, patent omnibus-checks, patent bed-making machines, patent coal companies, vegetable-sugar companies, Danubian loans, Aztec-temples-restoration society, Mecca-association-for-the-conveyance-of-pilgrims, Chinese anti-pigtail association, patent wash-tubs company, associated-Samaritan-loan company, and a hundred other brilliant chimeras of Mr. Owen's active brain, came to a definite, final, and, as it seemed irrevocable, if also somewhat lame and impotent, conclusion. Up to the last, he maintained that he was bound to make a fortune out of each and all of these ingenious combinations of capital and intellect; but Fortune, proverbially blind, so persistently turned her wheel the wrong way that, like the

baseless fabric of a vision, the insubstantial pageant of Mr. Owen's speculative fancy melted into thin air, leaving not a wrack behind. Then it was that the Marchese Martello, a scion of the great Roman house dei Martelli, coming to London about the affairs of the Pisan company for straightening the Leaning Tower, saw, wooed, and wedded the beautiful Hero Owen.

With that history, tragic or otherwise, we have no immediate concern, though its effects will hereinafter be seen, further than to state that the Marchesa Martello, *née* Hero Owen, is now crossing the lawn at Sprudelheim, arm in arm with her daughter, at every step approaching her cousin, Gerald Fitzgerald, more nearly. Mr. Owen, gallantly conducting his wife, struts on slightly in advance, stopping now and then that the delicate lady may rest. She is slightly lame, and the exertions of even what he calls her modified 'peripatetic performance' sends the colour into her pure pale face, flushing it painfully as she pauses in her laboured progress. Mr. Owen speaks in a loud, fluent, slightly dictatorial tone. He might be a chairman addressing a board of directors, or seeking to penetrate the thick skulls of unintelligent shareholders.

Gerald smiles as his uncle's familiar accents are borne to him across the plashing of the fountain, on the evening air. 'What a Barnum the old fellow is !' he says to himself, and looks past him at his womankind.

The Marchesa Martello is dressed, like her daughter, in a plain material of creamy white, that clings and falls in soft draperies, defining both graceful figures, the slender girlish one, and the more matured and womanly, in a modest fashion that conveys an impression of ease and comfort, together with trimness and spotless purity. Their large sunshades are white, and so are their hats and feathers, relieved by black velvet bows, and bound broadly with velvet of the same sombre hue. The mother wears black gloves and black ornaments; the daughter's gloves are tucked with a pocket handkerchief into the loose outside pocket of her dress; a gold thimble set with turquoise is on her dainty finger, and some delicate frills and lace fill the little work-basket she carries on her left arm. On her right, with a pretty assumption of protection and superiority, she supports her mother.

A tall, womanly girl of sixteen, it seems at first sight incredible that she can be the

child of the woman leaning on her arm. Yet a very few minutes' observation would convince an acute stranger of the fact that they are in very deed mother and child.

As for Mr. Owen, he flourishes with such perennial youth, has such an excellent digestion, sanguine temperament, and convenient conscience, that for sixty-seven years he has slept the refreshing sleep of the just; and in constitution and vivacity appears to be about five-and-twenty.

'How are you, Aunt?' says Gerald, lifting his hat as he steps forward out of the shade, and offers his hand to Mrs. Owen.

She takes it without comment. Life has no surprises left for her. Welcome, rather than astonishment, beams in her kindly eyes and smiling mouth. 'Oh, ah, yes, of course, Fitz—by all that's miracu—well, agreeable, propitious;' and Mr. Owen winks and coughs as he amends his original greeting, and contrives to get his elbow admonitorily amongst Fitzgerald's ribs, thus pointing the moral in the direction of discreet silence.

The young man is not ill-natured. Two beautiful ladies are looking at him with kind

eyes, waiting their turn ; of course he will not betray his uncle.

‘ Oh, ah, yes, of course ; the girls,’ says Mr. Owen, following Gerald’s eyes, ‘ charming surprise for them. Not that they need *cavaliere servente*, quite the contrary ; but one has to be careful of foreigners.’

‘ How are you ? ’ Gerald is saying to Hero, taking her hand and looking naturally and affectionately into her beautiful eyes. There is reverence as well as affection in his gaze, and for a moment it almost seems as though he would kiss the hand he holds, before making up his mind to relinquish it. But the publicity of their surroundings forbids effusiveness, and simpler habits prevail. After an imperceptible pause the hand is dropped, and Gerald looks across to Bianca, who is disputing with her grandfather, a suspicion of latent curiosity in his gaze.

‘ One has to be—careful ? ’ she says. ‘ Of what ? Of whom ? *Of foreigners ?* And why of “ *foreigners ?* ” Are we foreigners ? If so, people ought to be “ careful ” (I suppose it’s something offensive) of us. I’m sure *I* don’t see so much in English people to admire ! ’

‘ *Et tu, Brute !* ’ said Fitzgerald, laughing

at the girl's tirade ; ' allow me to introduce my friend Mr. Hudson, a patriotic Englishman, as they say in the old plays. This is my uncle, Mr. Owen, Hudson. My aunt, Mrs. Owen, and these ladies, the Marchesa Martello and her daughter, my cousins, you already know—I dare say—by sight,' and Hudson, blushing with joy and gratitude, bobs his head about in acknowledgment of the introduction, looking, after the fashion of the ingenuous British adolescent, intensely and hopelessly youthful.

' What did Fitz mean by saying I, too, was a brute?' asked Bianca of the embarrassed Hudson, as the little party, once again set in motion, strolled through the cool colonnades. ' Of course, I know about the quotation ; but who is the other brute? are you? '

' No, at least yes ; but not in that sense. You don't seem to admire the English, and I don't like the Germans, and he meant—he meant—I can't explain what he meant,' stammered the bashful youth. ' He had been talking, you know, and I was a little illiberal, perhaps—towards " foreigners," you know.'

' Ah ! many Englishmen are,' Bianca answered, with a capable air. From her pinnacles of superior age and experience, she

affably condescended to a young man six or eight years her senior. 'I think it a mean trait in the national character, myself. Not that we are English. My grandpapa is Irish, with a Scotch or semi-Scotch mother; my grand-mamma is French of the *vieille roche*, if you know what that means; my father—well the name Marchese Martello *dei Martelli*, you know, speaks for itself, and as his mother was German, we are "pretty much mixed," as the Americans say;' and she puts on a delightful little nasal accent.

Hudson laughed, and then half apologetically: 'You mustn't think I hate all foreigners,' he said.

'I am sure you are very kind to say so.'

Was she quizzing him? He was afraid to look at her. Every now and then the Owens paused, and then they all came together in a little knot, and so stood talking until Mrs. Owen again moved on.

'Have you known Fitz long?' Bianca asked; 'he's mamma's cousin, not mine. We call him "Fitz" amongst ourselves, though "Gerald" is a prettier name.'

'We have been at college together. At the same university I mean, though not at the

same time. That's very different, of course, and I am not of his year,' said Hudson, feeling suddenly very small.

'But Fitz has done with college in a sense. He is what they call "fellow and tutor" now: the youngest at Oxford. Isn't that an honour? Only not all the fellows and tutors are allowed to marry: and that's very hard upon them. If they do, they have to give up their luxuries and everything when they are quite old, and begin life again as parsons, or if they don't like that and are quite penniless, they must look out for something else to do.'

'Surely that is very seldom? I know lots of married Fellows.'

'I don't know. I've heard them talking about it.'

Hudson suddenly remembered that several terms had passed since he met Fitzgerald at some party given in his honour. The young don had then been resident at Oxford, in an important position, the greater part of a year. And he, Hudson, now in his 'third,' had been guilty of the gross breach of university etiquette implied by accosting a dignitary with as little ceremony as if both had come up freshmen together.

‘I think, if you will allow me, I will say good-night,’ he murmured ; and with a confused and mumbled farewell, the agitated youth took his departure.

‘*O ingenuens puer !*’ cried Mr. Owen in comment, his looks commercing with the skies. ‘What Hudsons are those I wonder ? The tobacco man, or the railway king, or the Government contractor ?’

‘Don’t talk Latin, G. P.,’ said Bianca.

‘And you are happy here—you and Bianca ?’ Fitzgerald was saying to Hero. ‘I can understand that, if you think the waters are doing my aunt good. That is everything. Shall you stay much longer ? Only you must not forget old England. We are not so black as we are painted ; and—and—but what nonsense for me to give you advice ; of course you know best what is most suitable, and the rest. I’m sure you will forgive me if I say that my aunt ought not to be allowed to think of the expense—certainly not to dwell upon it. Anxiety and worry are incompatible with a successful cure.’

‘Ah !’

‘*That* we must all discourage even at the risk of seeming unsympathetic. How could the

money be better spent? My uncle has been telling us there is an immense rise in the shares of the "Ararat Ark Company." I dare say you know all about it. Take advantage of the seven fat years after the seven lean, and persuade your mother against her scruples.'

'Oh! I am so glad,' Hero answered; 'one never knows; papa is so sanguine; and mamma feels things much more than people in health can understand. She cannot bear to spend anything on herself; she is so unselfish. And I—you know, I, Bianca—that is——'

'My dear cousin, my dear Hero, you and your mother——'

'Yes, yes; I know. But your friend has gone. Will you come in?'

'No; I think not—not to-night. Perhaps my uncle will walk a little way down the hill with me.'

'Here is the money,' Fitzgerald said half an hour later, as the two men were about to depart, 'don't let her lack for anything. I told Hero that the Ararat Company was a "big" thing, so don't betray me. But I don't like my aunt's look,' he added, in a more serious tone. 'Not that I would alarm anyone unnecessarily; but strangers, outsiders see what our nearest

seldom do. If there is anything to spare, buy Bianca some *chiffons* with it. Girls like gloves, and ribands, and that sort of thing. Only'—and the young man hesitated visibly—'let my aunt have everything first. It is not much, but I shan't have more at present—not for a few months. After that perhaps——'

'A carriage will save the fatigue of walking to the baths; they say the fatigue neutralises the good she might otherwise gain. And a little really good wine—Steinberger Cabinet say. Of course, it's drinking gold, that we know; a *vin de roi*: but when a princely heart gives——'

Fitzgerald had fled. There are things flesh and blood can't endure.

'Ah!' said Mr. Owen, complacently, 'good boy that according to his lights. Of course Madame must have some of the spoils, but—well, I shall be able to take up the shares allotted to me in the "Desert Fisheries Association," and to pay the call on the "Cabbage Candles Company," Limited, and leave enough for an excursion or two for the girls, and the shawl that little minx in the ballet set her heart upon.'

The stars were twinkling in the heavens as he opened the garden gate, and went up towards

the house with a conscience at peace with himself and all the world.

'Give us a song, Hero,' he said, in his pleasant mood.

His wife was on the sofa ; her luminous grey eyes turned full upon the face of her daughter as she sang. Bianca was playing in the balcony with some Russian children, whose parents shared their villa with the Owens.

Fitzgerald, glad to be alone, a little lifted out of himself, a little excited, his heart beating a little faster than usual, he knew not why, paced to and fro beneath the colonnade, listening to the murmurs of the fountain of the portico.

CHAPTER III.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

‘If ever a woman might have been excused, my poor child, you were that woman.’

‘If, mother? Yes—if. But what woman ever was excused? What woman ever will be?’

‘God forgive me! It is not for your mother to loosen the landmarks. The world is bitterly cruel.’

‘Ah! and there is so much behind one, so much lived through and lived down, that one would be thankful to forget, mother. If one pulls out so much as one little brick, down tumbles the whole building, and the work has to be begun all over again. It seems as if one could not summon up courage; that the task is so difficult one must fold one’s hands, and let things drift. And yet, that is impossible. I don’t know, *Mamma mia*, how we came to

‘speak of such things. It is a profitless discussion. It leads to nothing.’

But Léonie Owen was looking at her daughter with a far-away gaze, that took no note of Hero’s words. Her pale face was disturbed by some inner emotion, and yet she was silent. Her expression had something of inspiration, of that rapt and intense kind which suffices of itself to the kindling soul, without the aid of speech.

‘What is it, mother? Is it anything in me? Is it anything new?’

‘It is everything in you, my child. How can I look at you, at your past, at your future, at even the palpable present, and not tremble? To think the time is not far distant when I must leave you alone; when I shall not be here to shield you, to help you, to sympathise with, and to love you! That, whatever your trouble, you must bear it in silence, without me, your other self, your older, stronger, harder self. Ah! the thought makes death so bitter, so cruel, my love, that all my resignation flies, and I am nothing but a rebel. And yet it is only our poor vanity that makes us think we are indispensable—necessary to the happiness of others.’

‘Mother, hush; pray don’t; you are so much better; you are nervous to-day, and so you imagine these things. I cannot bear you to talk like that; I cannot bear it. You must outlive me, for I—I *could* not live without you.’

‘No; there it is. This world has still power to pain your sensitive soul, my child; sharp tongues can still agonise you, though pride may hide the wounds. But for me, I am old, I am case-hardened, I am tough. I am good to break the shocks that only reach you now through the mother’s blunted feelings or world-buffed heart; but Hero, if—if I could only see you happy I should die happy.’

‘Mother, you must not talk of dying. It means a Trappist future for me. You, who know me, *know all*. I should have to tell myself, to explain myself, my life, my past, to anyone, to everyone else; and, as I could never do that, I should be condemned to eat out my heart in silence. A man’s love is not like the mother-love, large, unselfish. Though innocent of blame my past would be an offence to a jealous nature.’

‘Unless—alas! alas Hero. I dare not speak. Yet how can I be silent?’ and, stooping over her daughter as she sat on a low stool at her

feet, the mother whispered, stroking the hands and hair and face she loved, kissing the lips and the forehead, 'to think that no lover has once whispered to you as your old mother does, that you are fair, that your eyes give light, your lips happiness; that your words are music in his ears; that no strong arm has ever opposed its sheltering strength between you and the world; no pride in you, no joy in your grace and sweetness, no true close sympathy has ever made life beautiful and joyous to you; but that only I—only your poor old mother—should breathe those loving follies in your ears; that you, so formed and fitted to bestow and to receive happiness, to spend joy and gladness, to love and be loved, should have passed the best years of your life in loneliness and sorrow!'

'If there were only *that* to regret, mother.'

'But it includes all the rest.'

'Yet how few women are really happy; happy in the best and highest sense.'

'Perhaps because very few women are capable of inspiring or enjoying the best and highest happiness.' To this Hero made no reply, and the mother said no more.

It was not a mere material vegetating con-

dition of well-being that she had desired, and did earnestly desire, for her daughter. When death beckoned Léonie de Courteville's young lover away into the Silent Land, the bright ambitious boy (he had but just won his epaulettes) had obeyed the sign without a murmur. His death had not been on the battle-field, no laurels decked his coffin ; but, with military obedience, he recognised the orders of his Commanding Officer, and under arrest for eternity, kept a brave front to the foe. A lock of curly hair rested on the young girl's heart, as she rose for the last time from the bedside of her soldier-cousin ; but no one, not even her mother, knew that the blossom of love had been nipped in the bud, and that hope lay dead on the young soldier's silent breast. There had been no loud vehemence, no violence of demonstration about her modest maiden grief. There had been, necessarily, more of tenderness than passion, more of affection than of romance, in it ; but as one twin will sicken and pine for want of its companion creature, as one sister or brother will fade and perish for the utter need it has of its sympathetic sister or brother-soul, so Léonie's heart was buried in the grave of him to whom, in

the eyes of all her relations, she had been as a sister and as a sister only.

Yet she understood duty well enough to know that it meant marriage for her when M. de Courteville told her that an eccentric Englishman, who required no portion, though he was willing to make unlimited marriage-settlements on his future wife, had requested the honour of her hand.

In well-ordered French households, '*la famille*' includes, as does the bare mention of 'The State' in German homes, both motive and argument. There was the exemption of her father from the usually inevitable '*dot*' to be considered, and the advantages thereby accruing to her brother to be weighed; besides that little, vague, irritating suspicion of stigma which, in French eyes, attaches to '*demoiselles*' who, being past their '*first youth*,' neither marry nor go into a convent.

The poor dead boy should have no successor, no rival. Women who shut themselves up in opinionated griefs were selfish, Léonie thought, and not unfrequently sacrificing in the pursuit of a chimera the happiness of others as well as their own. And thus Léonie gave her hand without scruple or hesitation to Mr.

Owen, knowing that she would be able to do her duty none the worse because of the memory of that far-away dead-and-gone love of her early girlhood—a love of which not even to her mother had she ever breathed a word, knowing it to be outside the realm of sympathy as maidenhood is understood in the French scheme of education.

But she had somewhat over-estimated her strength. Full of fond enthusiasms and generous beliefs in a high ideal, well-read, accomplished, refined and cultured herself, it was not the difference of race or tongue that jarred upon her in Owen; it was the innate vulgarity and commonplaceness of his character that dispirited, discouraged and baffled her. Her married life, spent in almost greater seclusion than her maidenhood, brought with it but the twilight of half-impressions, and starved and narrowed in one direction concentrated itself in the sublime unselfishness of maternity. The one touch of passion native to her character lay in her motherhood; in those mystic instincts of self-devotion which make Christianity more especially the religion of maternity. All that life had hitherto denied her, all that she had once hoped for and

seemed for ever to have missed, all possibilities of beauty, and joy, and happiness, she saw in the little bud whose blossom it would be hers to realise and rejoice in. When she felt her babe's warm rosy feet trampling in satin nakedness their initial path from her knees to her shoulder, her heart beat beneath the fluttering tentative footsteps as though they were so many caresses, and came at last to live only the life of the child. And so, as with the baby and little toddling girl, on into her young maidenhood, until Hero, beautiful as a poet's dream, ignorant and innocent still, yet full of eager curiosity to know more nearly a world which from a distance looked so fair, was called upon, a not unwilling, and yet profoundly will-less, sacrifice to pay a father's debt.

It came so suddenly, it was accomplished so peremptorily, that, in after times, it seemed to the frantic mother she must have been fatally spell-bound to allow things to take their fatal course, as she had done, in mute, hopeless despair. Why had she let this Iphigenia be led smiling to the altar, decked in dazzling sacrificial garments, gazing open-eyed in innocent anticipation and wonder at the festive preparations that showed her the Shrine as

anything rather than the Place of Atonement? Why had she, the mother, not flung herself in protestation between her child and destruction, shaken off the petty bonds of use and custom, of form and conventionality, and appealed to men and fathers by their strength, to women and mothers by their tenderness, to form round the sacred virgin, and in the name of humanity wrest maiden innocence and ignorance from the profanation of a stranger's touch? Why had she not invoked wrath on this unholy compact, calling men to witness to its ruthless iniquity? Why had she not cast herself prostrate between the porch and the altar, and dared the glittering procession to advance across her's, the mother's, prone body, before she let her one ewe-lamb, her darling, be taken from her?

But none of these things had happened.

On the contrary. Trippingly, as though the course of love proverbially ran smooth, the preparations went their jaunty way. A daily white bouquet for the girl-bride, who took it, smiling at her new importance; a daily drive with the handsome Italian bridegroom in a hired carriage; the complacent father playing propriety, whilst Hero prattled

and rattled like a school-girl on a half-holiday ; nightly communings and reckonings, contrivings and speculatings, and strange talk of capital and interest, of percentages, premiums and discounts, and stock and scrip and shares, and companies between the two men ; a release from all responsibility as regarded Mr. Owen's part in straightening the 'Pisan Tower,' and carrying out the 'Campagna Sheepfold Company,' culminating in the clash and clang of the wedding-bells of Hero's marriage-morning.

There had been nothing tragic about it. Nothing palpably tragic, that is. Modern life is intolerant of tragedy, and, to take its outside estimate, 'cakes and ale and ginger hot i' the mouth,' are more to the general taste than the bowl and the dagger. And thus at times it almost seemed to Léonie that she had been mad in thinking to avert the climax by such wild means as, in her extremity, she had mentally invoked ; whilst, mixing strongly with her love for the child, there grew a sense of responsibility and remorse, as of injury done and expiation to be made.

A presentiment had warned her of the misery to come, and yet she had disregarded the monition, and had supinely let things

take their course, consenting tacitly to the sacrifice which she had not the power to prevent.

‘Mother!’ cried Bianca, coming into the room where Léonie and Hero sat silent, both occupied with thoughts of the past, ‘the Kerezoffs have offered to drive me to the Duke’s hunting-lodge, and they want you to come too. Fitz and his friend, Mr. Hudson, and G. P. are to go in one carriage, so there is a place vacant in their droschky for you; the Kerezoff children and the governess started, on donkeys, hours ago, and I am going in their waggonette with the Baron and Baroness, and two or three Prussian officers.’

‘Did you know of the arrangement?’ Léonie asked, looking at her daughter.

She was not like most grandmothers, doting and weak to the younger generation. On the contrary, she watched Bianca jealously, and was not always pleased with what she saw.

‘I heard them talking of it last night,’ Hero answered.

If the Kerezoffs did not ask her to drive with them, she could scarcely thrust herself into their waggonette. On the other hand, they had asked her daughter, and it seemed

that, with the gentlemen invited, the vehicle would be full.

‘You can come with me in the second carriage,’ she said, looking at Bianca instead of at her mother.

‘Oh, no, mamma. The Kerezoffs asked me last week, and, if I went in your carriage, we should have to turn one of our gentlemen out. It could not be G. P., because he, simply, would not go. As it is Fitz’s carriage, I suppose we can scarcely propose to put him on his own box like a footman. Then that Oxford friend of his is a stranger, so we could not in decency expel him for the sake of the family party inside.’

‘I think it a great impertinence on the part of Baroness Kerezoff,’ said Mrs. Owen, in a vexed tone. ‘She knows perfectly well that a girl of your age ought not to be separated from her own family.’

Bianca’s fearless assertion of equality was a permanent astonishment to her grandmother.

‘The separation by the length of a wagonette is not exactly tragic,’ Bianca said, still smiling and willing to be amiable if they would let her.

‘And your mother was the person to be

asked,' her grandmother broke in. 'You could have followed with your grandpapa, if it was necessary you should go and there was no room for both you and your mother in the Kerezoff's waggonette.'

'We are not obliged to go at all,' Hero said, experimentally. 'After all it's quite an informal affair; or'—trying to throw oil on the troubled waters—'the Baroness would have treated me with more ceremony.'

'What are you talking about?' cried Mr. Owen, bustling in, very red in the face, very important, and putting a new hat and gloves down on the table. 'I can't have you disoblige the Kerezoffs. Kerezoff, as I have told you, was formerly employed by the Russian Government as an inspector of mines. He knows all about the green copper mines that we are going to bring out in London as a company, if only things go straight—the celebrated Immensikoff and Zaratoff mines. Just as if all this woman's stuff about precedence, chaperons, and that sort of humbug could be allowed to stand in the way of common sense and business. Let me "float" my mines, and you can quarrel as much as you please afterwards.'

'Common sense certainly points to a mother

keeping watch over her own daughter,' said Mrs. Owen, severely.

Her words, as she felt, were not well chosen, and Mr. Owen jumped at the mistake. He had a theory that all women were by nature jealous, and he had no mind that grand-maternal weaknesses should influence the fate of Zaratoff copper.

'Jealousy, eh?' he cried, 'stuff and nonsense! Well, it's no news that the poet made a mistake; poets do, occasionally. Jealousy, thy name is woman!'

'Indeed, I am not jealous,' Hero said quietly, taking the accusation to herself; 'but,' stretching out her soft white hand and laying it on Bianca's brown fingers, 'I do not like my little daughter to be running about without her mother.'

'But you are going too, *Mamma mia!*'

'To drive behind the Kerezoff waggonette and swallow all their dust. You are very kind, Bianca,' interposed her grandmother. 'No! I protest against that. If your mother goes she must start first, otherwise it will be unendurable. I wonder at your proposing such a thing, with the thermometer at 87° in

the shade, and the dust of accumulated ages on these German roads.'

'Mamma's cosmopolitan soul is above water-carts,' said Bianca, defiantly.

'To start before my little girl would look like abandoning her indeed,' said Hero.

The discussion pained and wearied her, she could scarcely have said why.

'Stuff. One would imagine to hear you talk that you were going across the Atlantic without her,' interjected Mr. Owen. 'What a devil of a fuss women do make about nothing.'

'It is not "nothing" to us, we being women,' his daughter answered, in a low voice, her spiritless manner effectually hiding the epigram.

'And, for the matter of that, Hero, it seems like affectation your insisting so much on your maternal duties; for, to speak plainly, you require a chaperon quite as much as—if I were not afraid of giving offence, I should say a great deal more than—Bianca. Bianca is a child' (the young lady made a grimace), 'you are a young woman, looking even younger than you are. It is of very little consequence what a girl in the schoolroom does. In fact, Bianca ought to have gone on a donkey with

the little Kerezoffs and their governess. As she hasn't, I beg you won't offend these people by refusing to carry out the programme. We three men shall bore each other to death in Fitz's droschky, and I hope you will get ready and go with a good grace; so let there be no more about it;' and, taking no notice of Bianca's pouts, Mr. Owen closed the discussion by leaving the room.

Fitz's honest face looked a little blank, or so Hero fancied, as, ten minutes later, Bianca nodded to him from the balcony upon which the Kerezoff apartments opened, and announced that she should warn her friends not to start for another half-hour, as she particularly disliked swallowing dust.

'Bianca does not come with us?' he asked, looking at Hero.

'No. It appears this is an old engagement with the Kerezoffs, which I had not understood. I am sorry, but papa thought it would not do to make a fuss, and alter the original arrangements. I did not understand them, it seems, or I should certainly have refused for her.'

Bianca, who was on the balcony, could not hear what they were saying in the carriage, or she would not have nodded at them quite so

amicably. 'You look very comfortable,' she cried; 'I almost wish I were with you.' Having got her own way she could afford to be gracious.

'I will go on the box!' (from Fitz eagerly).

'No, no! And take care, G. P., that mamma does not flirt too much, or I shall be jealous.'

'Foolish child,' said Hero, mildly flattered.

'Drive on,' cried Mr. Owen to the coachman, in his best German; and so the dejected party jolted off, finally dismissed by Bianca from her balcony, until the two hopeless screws and the dilapidated droschky disappeared into the dust and sunshine of the summer's afternoon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUKE'S HUNTING-SCHLOSS.

It was scarcely a congruous party; the elements of coherence being chiefly conspicuous by their absence.

Hudson, awed by the beauty of the silent lady opposite to him, perplexed, after the manner of Britons, as to the correct style of addressing a person afflicted with a foreign title, impressed (as perhaps only an undergraduate can be impressed) with the greatness and glory and grandeur of the youthful don by his side, and feeling, for certain reasons, on uncertain ground with Mr. Owen, was, for him, exceptionally taciturn.

An unmistakable cloud lay on Fitzgerald's generally serene brow, and Hero, after saying a word or two as civility demanded, fell back in the carriage, and continued to gaze blankly out into the afternoon world from beneath the becoming shadow of a pink-lined parasol.

‘No, but a charming chintz and Brussels lace,’ etc. etc., quoted Fitz, with cynical ill-humour, to himself.

Hero was, evidently, ill at ease; whether in mind or body, he could not tell, but not too ill at ease, not too unhappy to ignore the value of a pink-lined parasol. The next moment he seemed to himself a mean, ill-natured, and contemptible fellow; an unmanly, vulgar-minded affecter of cheap cynicism. Fortunately for him the sneer had not become vocal (not that he thought any the better of himself for that), but he hated himself for having so much as brushed Hero’s spotless raiment with his ill-humour. His manner became, generally, more genial, and there was something almost apologetic in his tone to Hero. An injury done to an unsuspecting and unsuspecting person seems, to the doer, a double injury.

The road led by a gradual ascent through an avenue of Spanish chestnuts which presently became a dense forest. Here and there a ranger wished them good-day; now and again a woodcutter, driving a donkey that looked liked a perambulatory faggot-stack, crossed their path, and, with a rough and ready greeting, disappeared down a sunlit glade. A fresh

breeze was rippling the surface of the young wood; the shining leaves seemed to be babbling and prattling in their joy that the winter was over and past, and the song of the turtle heard once more in the land. The driver asked if the *Herrschaften* would get out and walk, explaining that the footpath was nearer, easier, and pleasanter. Mr. Owen, scenting an attempt to evade the bargain, and crediting their clumsy Jehu with a desire to impose and cheat the unwary Briton, felt indisposed to move. The younger men were glad to stretch their long limbs, cramped with the exiguity of a conveyance which not even the maddest *cultus* for courtesy-titles could classify as the conventional 'carriage.'

Hero, folding up the frivolous sunshade, descended with alacrity.

The earth beneath their feet appeared to give way; they did not really touch the ground, but trod upon the dried leaves of immemorial autumns, elastic and springy, with a fine woodland odour, familiar (and dear) to all pedestrian lovers of sylvan scenery. The chequered shade lay in bright moving patches, flecking the ground with intermingled sunlight and shadow, like little tricky translated cloudlets chasing

each other over the ground in frolicsome pursuit. Against the clear blue sky, the fresh young leaves of this season fluttered joyously in the light mountain breezes. Hero, walking bareheaded through the upland forest, in her simple white dress, attended by a knight and a squire of goodly thews and sinews, suggested Una with far more justice than the pink-lined parasol had recalled Narcissa; and something of the contrition he felt for having wronged her, though only by a passing thought, made itself apparent in the inflection of Fitz's voice.

More than once Hudson glanced shrewdly at his friend, looking instantly, as one always does in a wood, straight ahead again. It was the manner not the matter that was suggestive. Hudson was exceptionally boyish of his age, but he had his intuitions.

Within a quarter of a mile of the hunting-Schloss they came upon the Kerezoff children; governess, and donkeys, equally dead beat.

‘We will go with you,’ they shouted to Hero, glad, after the manner of their kind, of any diversion that promised to enlarge their boundaries, and carry them beyond the irksomeness of supervision. The denizens of a despotically governed land, they were as much

the modern child as the smartest New York juvenile.

‘Not if we know it,’ answered Fitzgerald, looking behind, as he had already done once or twice on the upward journey. ‘See! here is Mr. Owen, seated in state in an empty carriage. You might join him; or, better still, there is the waggonette!’

Shouts of joy hailed the announcement. The waggonette meant ladies and gentlemen to take the young rebels’ part against mild Mademoiselle. Mamma would be too busy to scold them; obviously the waggonette was the Car of Liberty of their desires.

‘Young ruffians!’ laughed Fitz, as they surged up a mossy bank, ready to spring out, frighten the horses, and inaugurate endless disaster. ‘What do you say? Shall we wait for—the others?’

‘For Bianca? Yes!’ said her mother, with a little air of mixed anxiety and displeasure.

The Baroness Kerezoff, a small, slight, sallow woman, with high cheek-bones and grey obliquely-set eyes, by turns voluble and gracious, impertinent or obliging, was the first to descend. A certain veneer, or more accurately speaking, French polish, did not, at

an emergency, altogether suffice to hide the natural grain of the material. Scratch the smooth shining surface of Russian *savoir faire*, and although you might not find the proverbial Tartar, you would certainly find something less or other than you looked for. To speculate as to what that 'Something,' good or evil, better or worse, might be, were an utter loss of time.

'I, who was so good to that ungrateful wretch, my dear,' she one day said, complaining to Hero of an unfaithful friend; 'there was nothing I did not do, and would not have done for her. I even lent her my false hair!'

A little shudder thrilled through her hearer. And yet the woman must be essentially frank, and free from guile, to make such a statement. Only, it would have been so much pleasanter had there been no necessity either for the false hair or the free confidence.

The Baroness Kerezoff was always exquisitely and appropriately, if somewhat lavishly, dressed. No one ever saw her in last season's fashions; and if, to the uninitiated, her toilettes appeared simple, the better instructed knew that costly simplicity is just by so much the more extravagant as serpentine is dearer than

marbled paper, or malachite than coloured glass.

On this occasion she wore an Indian cachemire *feuille-morte* dress, richly embroidered in silk of a darker shade, a brown hat trimmed with leaves of every shade of autumnal tint, brown Swedish gloves reaching to the elbow, bewitching little brown shoes and silk stockings with faint pink clocks, a brown parasol embroidered like her dress, and lined with faint pink to match the clocks discreetly revealed by her rapid descent from the waggonette. A magnificent silver belt in old Russian *repoussé* work clasped her dainty waist, earrings and studs to match, whilst the natural gnarled stick of her parasol bore her monogram in silver, and a superb brown fan, mounted to correspond, dangled with half a hundred costly trifles from her waist.

In the country on her estates, or visiting amongst her intimates, Madame de Kerezoff was frankly sallow. In society, dressed for a ball, she was as delicately tinted as Gibson's Venus.

‘Ah! here you are, dear madame!’ she cried in irreproachable French, devoid of all accent, caressing and courteous, yet markedly

devoid of familiarity. ‘You were wise to choose the carriage!’ (Hero smiled.) ‘To go sideways, like a crab, staring at your opposite neighbour all the way, is, I assure you, a strain, but a strain on the nervous system that takes years off one’s life. I feel like that French queen who turned grey in a night, only I shall have distanced her, doing it in one afternoon; not in the solitude of my cell, but on a party of pleasure, in the open air;’ and thus, chattering gaily the irresponsible nonsense that came uppermost, she put one foot on the step and one tiny gloved hand on the shoulder of the *cavaliere servente* who stood at the door of the waggonette, and fluttering down to earth, said almost without a pause, looking at Hero’s companions: ‘Kindly present your friends to me, dear madame.’

‘I do not know how it is,’ she said, speaking French very rapidly as Fitzgerald and Hudson made each his respective and very English bow, and then stepped modestly into the background, ‘but to me it always, ridiculously enough, seems as though English people were related to one another. I have not that feeling with Continentals, not even with Americans, but with the English invariably.’

‘You are not altogether wrong this time,’ Hero said.

‘Ah! you are lucky to have two *beaux cousins*.’

Something in the tone rather than the words made Hero blush and then disclaim. ‘Indeed, you do me too much honour,’ she said. ‘Mr. Hudson is only an acquaintance, and Mr. Fitzgerald, if a cousin, *un peu à la mode de Bretagne!*’

‘You must not disown me in a strange land!’ cried Fitz, with an effort to be agreeably playful.

But Hero had no repartee ready; her eyes were fixed on the waggonette, where Bianca, chattering gaily with a Prussian lieutenant, was indulgently smiled upon by Baron Kerezoff.

‘Come, Bianca,’ said her mother; ‘we are all waiting for you.’

‘*Et moi, Madame?*’

‘It is true! I had forgotten you,’ laughed Madame de Kerezoff. ‘Let me introduce Baron Mellin.’

Hero bowed gravely to the taciturn personage thus presented to her. Bianca was still in the waggonette. Fitzgerald and Hudson stood a little in the background, waiting. They

felt themselves to be very unimportant and somewhat extraneous to this polyglot party.

‘Shall we walk?’ asked Madame de Kerezoff, addressing no one in particular, but suiting the action to the word, as she moved in the direction of the Schloss. But Hero hesitated.

‘One moment,’ she said; ‘I have a shawl for Bianca; do not let me detain you,’ and raising her voice slightly she called, this time with a note of impatience in her accent, ‘Are you coming, Bianca?’

‘Directly, mamma; I am teaching Lieutenant von Hanstein an English riddle,’ and both Baron Kerezoff and the young Prussian seemed highly flattered and amused by Bianca’s efforts at instruction.

It was not amusing for the rest of the party.

Hero felt that for a group of English people, invited guests, to horde together talking to one another in their own language, whilst they left host and hostess to the conversation of their own compatriots, was, to say the least, in the worst possible taste.

Yet a vague sense of uneasiness troubled her, and determined her for once to sacrifice good breeding to her maternal instincts. Something in Fitzgerald’s face and manner told her

that he, too, was dissatisfied—he, to whom the critical mood was not natural.

‘They are so intensely domestic, these English,’ said Madame de Kerezoff, handing Mellin her sunshade to carry, and nodding her head in Hero’s direction; ‘to me, the bourgeois manners of the present day are simply detestable; and the worst of it is they are becoming fashionable, since royalty has elected to act the nursemaid.’ *Bonne d’enfant* were Madame de Kerezoff’s words.

‘We can scarcely complain of our Imperial family in that respect.’

‘I do not know. What can be more bourgeois than this left-handed marriage of the Emperor’s?’

‘Marriage?’

‘Yes, marriage. The Empress is a saint of twenty years’ standing; as much dead as if she had been canonised for centuries. She smiles on the arrangement because by this means the Emperor is kept faithful to the mother of his young family, and she prays for him and her and them, night and day. Where it is a question of the choice of evils, a bigamous marriage is better than an Eastern harem.’

‘Admirable woman!’

‘Is it me or the Empress that you are apostrophising? But, jesting apart, that is as one takes it. Then look at the Czarewitch and his uxorious folly.’

‘Perhaps not so bad as it’s painted.’

‘They tell me that in England fashionable women cram half a dozen children into their Victorias, in servile imitation of the citizen manners that prevail at Court; and this English-woman makes herself utterly ridiculous with her great, overgrown daughter. She ought to put her into pinafores and send her to school, or at any rate treat her like the child she is.’

‘A very charming child.’

‘*A la bonne heure*; only I am very glad she is not mine.’

Mr. Owen, tired of solitude, had seized upon Baron Kerezoff; Fitzgerald, waiting to see if he could be of use, suddenly found himself taken possession of by Lieutenant von Hanstein, who being a young man of acquisitive turn, was questioning him upon the English army, navy, militia, and marines, laboriously and conscientiously improving the occasion by airing his English, and trying at the same time to profit by the linguistic lesson which his victim was quite aware that he was giving. Indeed,

Fitzgerald's humour, though, for the moment, grim, was tickled by the practical young man's undisguised and eager attention.

'Bianca,' said her mother, drawing the girl's arm within her own, 'I wish you would show a little kindness to Mr. Hudson. He is here a stranger amongst strangers; and it is dull for him, not understanding either French or German well.'

The anxious mother thought, in her simple artfulness, that her girl could not have a better watch-dog than the honest, blunt, young Englishman, to whom (she instinctively felt) every girl was, as yet, as sacred as his own sisters. As a matter of fact, Hudson had no sisters, being that risky product, an only child.

'Why is he so stupid?'

'I do not think he is stupid; only, perhaps, a little shy. But, as he is Fitz's friend, we ought to be kind to, and pleasant with, him.'

'That is Fitz's own business. But come on, mamma, they will think you are scolding me, and we are ever so far behind the others.'

It was true; and Hero felt that her child's worldly wisdom was in excess of her own, and the moment practically unpropitious for further parental admonition.

‘Will you give me your arm?’ she said kindly to Hudson, seeking to draw him into conversation, and to open the way for friendly intercourse. The young fellow blushed crimson with delight, and as he felt Hero’s hand upon his arm it seemed to him that the light touch of this sweet and gracious woman conveyed a sense of honour, dignity, and self-respect. Unconsciously he drew himself up, threw his head back, and walked proudly forwards. He felt as though he could do battle with all the world for her sake; and, if his thoughts of Bianca were as sacred as his thoughts of his sister could have been, the divinity of womanhood conveyed by Hero’s touch, set the sign and seal of manhood upon the boy’s fresh heart; all unwittingly Hero had given him his accolade, and henceforth the young knight was consecrated to ladies’ service. Her intuition had told her that upon an emergency he would be a useful and trusty ally. Although she did not know it he would now, at a word or look from her, mount guard on Bianca, nor budge an inch before the world.

With that delicacy which seems a distinctive attribute of the finer feminine nature, Hero felt that she could tacitly enlist the ardent

youth in her service where she could not, in so many words, invoke the aid of a grown man.

Fitzgerald was their cousin, and therefore, in some sense, a brother to Hero; but Fitzgerald had already looked with critical if not condemnatory eyes at Bianca. He had worn an expression of dissatisfaction throughout the afternoon, and Hero shrank from exposing her child's thoughtlessness to unnecessarily severe stricture. Where Hudson in his young ingenuousness would see nothing and suspect less, Fitzgerald, in his older, worldly wisdom, might discover coquetry, a spirit of intrigue, a feminine frivolity, and a lightness upon the weights, in comparison with which even vanity itself seemed a solid attribute. The jealousies of mature manhood are often less personal jealousies than the jealousy of the unsullied fame of their womankind. Hero felt that even the suspicion of a light word spoken of herself or Bianca, would burn like fire into Fitzgerald's soul, setting his cheeks aflame like the brand of dishonour; and this knowledge stirred her heart uneasily beneath the assumed carelessness of her manner.

Men who know men as they really are, not as they seem to be to women, must inevitably

be sensitive on certain points. License of expression, to which they have hitherto tacitly objected on the ground of bad taste only, assumes a very different aspect so soon as they divine a possibility of the same coarse criticisms which they have heard freely applied to other men's sisters and wives being applied to their own personal belongings. The risk of making himself ridiculous, by the exhibition of fastidious taste or untimely 'prudishness,' keeps many a man silent, whose better nature is revolted by the idle talk of what the Apostle aptly calls 'lewd fellows of the baser sort.'

The whole party had been over the Schloss, wondered at the buckhorn furniture and green velvet upholstery, admired the chandeliers of huge antlers and the spreading horns of many a noble buck decorating the walls, beneath each *Geweih* a little ivory or buckhorn *plaque*, telling what royal or imperial hand had brought down the monarch of the forest herd.

They had been out into the thicket and hidden themselves in a leafy arbour, whilst the head-keeper, blowing a most cruelly discordant blast on an old tin-trumpet, had assembled the wild boars of the district for their inspection. The grotesque instrument, the lean figure of

the swineherd, the odd appearance of the animals of all ages and sizes that came trooping out of the converging forest glades, gave a strange unfamiliar aspect to the scene.

‘It is like a page of Don Quixote or Rabelais,’ whispered Hero to Fitzgerald.

‘*Pst!*’ grumbled, in parenthesis, the Teutonic trumpeter. ‘The *Herrschaft* must be quiet; the swine are very *empfindlich*.’

The idea of ‘sensitive swine’ did not aid Hero’s efforts at gravity, but the severe tone of the local guardian made the rebuke significant.

‘Rather of the gospel,’ Fitzgerald irreverently replied. ‘I know many people who might be brought up here with advantage, if only the age of miracles were not past——’

‘If the *Herrschaften* really wish,’ began the guttural voice of the sour-visaged *Schweine-hirt* remonstratively.

There was silence.

The solemn functionary disappeared into a rustic hut on the border of the large circular open space which had been cleared in the thicket, and, presently returning with some compound dear to the palate of porcine epicurism, he was immediately surrounded by the multitude of brindled beasts that the travel-

lers had come out to see. The patriarch of the tribe was presently pointed out and easily recognised in a huge formidable tusked monster; 'On his bow-back a battle set Of bristly pikes,' his small malicious red eyes, 'His brawny sides, with hairy bristles set, His short thick neck not easy harmed,' and with a 'snout that digs sepulchres,' he looked as like the famous boar that slew the fair Adonis as Will Shakspeare himself could have imagined.

'What a treat for Briton Rivière!' whispered Fitzgerald, pointing to a trough where animals of all sizes were pushing, grunting, snuffling, and trampling in their eagerness to get their snouts well into its appetising contents.

'Yes; I suppose it is the fashion of the day to see humour in such things,' said Hero, a little disgusted by the unsavoury sights and sounds. 'I have seen enough. It is curious—and—unedifying. No, do not follow me;' and she walked gently but swiftly away from the leafy screen, across a piece of broken ground, into the courtyard of the castle, glad to be alone.

As the horses had to be found and put to, and the drivers were somewhere in the woods,

she would have half an hour's grace. Passing beneath a small archway, Hero found herself in a green quadrangle, with a low wall on the southern side. Leaning upon the parapet she gazed out into the golden evening sunset.

The distant horizon was bounded by purple mountains. The vast plain intersected by the winding river lay spread out in marvellous variety at her feet. Towns and cities, towers and spires were reflected in the transparent flood. Great battle-fields, dyed in historic pages with the dark red of slaughtered armies, now lay buried beneath those blooming gardens, teeming vineyards and broad sheets of yellow corn. Mile rolled upon mile in undulating forest waves; vast herds of deer, plainly visible, led by stately antlered chieftains through the slanting rays to take their wonted evening refreshment, crossed the green open spaces and disappeared into the forest glades again, on their way to the famed and fabled waters that washed the base of many a ruined rocky summit.

Hero's heart was full. Full of the bitterness of the unforgotten past, of cruel memories, of carking cares and dumb, baffled anxieties that could find no outlet in the present, nor

hope for any in the future. She was glad to have escaped for the moment, thankful to be alone, away from the heedless chatterers, apart and silent. Yet, as she leaned and gazed across into the vastness of the evening, she felt the infinite littleness of all petty personal cares and sorrows, the nothingness of the individual life with its hopes and fears, its faithlessness and forgetfulness, its struggle and its protest. 'So careless of the single life, so careful of the type.' Hushed into quiescence and acquiescence by the immensity, the solemnity, the silence of Nature; awed by the eternal mystery and burthen of Humanity; submissive before the Sphinx-like calm of the inscrutable, immemorially cruel mother, Hero, in her self-forgetfulness, had any eye been there to note the change, must have seemed greater and other than the conventional woman we have seen with a pink-lined parasol.

"Oh that I had wings, had wings like a dove; then would I flee away and be at rest!"

The words, breathed rather than spoken, seemed themselves winged; it was as though they carried the aspiration of the soul out into the sunset skies, as angels are pictured bearing the spirits of departed saints through the

midnight land towards a triumphant dawn on heavenly shores.

As she stood there, lost in contemplation, her soul seemed to go before her, to rise and expand, to soar forth into the Unknown, to float across the waving summits of the trees, now crowned with the red gold of evening, across the castled crags, over towns and villages and cottage gardens, over fields and vineyards, across the rolling flood, across the plains and battle-fields, on and yet on, past tower, and spire, and palace, and prison, past human voices and tears, crimes and griefs, and sins, and shames; beyond sickness, want and death; wrong, oppression, and violence; beyond the distant purple mountains into the infinite Unknown—into Space.

‘You will take cold, the Baroness says; she sends you a shawl.’

Poor Hero! In a moment, in a second of time, she was brought back again from her excursion into the Empyrean.

Conventionality is stronger, at its weakest, than our wildest flights of fancy. The tyranny of the commonplace finds few rebels, and ‘convenience’ enjoys a catholic *cultus*.

Even a coxcomb must, under the circum-

stances, have felt his mission to be unfortunate, and Baron, or as he preferred to be called, Monsieur de Mellin, was no coxcomb.

Something of the transcendental, some faint glimmering, as of a reflected glory, still lingered on Hero's brow, as, brought summarily to earth again, she turned with a smile to thank the courteous shawl-bearing stranger who had involuntarily, but none the less inopportunately, interrupted her reverie.

The very language that he spoke jarred upon her. Russian would have been more in harmony with her mood, as something, to her, mystic and unknown like the Eternal Secret. German would have suited that land of primeval forests, wild boars and castled crags, where the spirit of mediævalism still lingered long after date. But French! French, the finikin dancing-master tongue of the boulevards, the flippant medium of folly and frivolity! And then, too, that tacit confession of a subordinate *rôle* amongst the nations, implied in men who forget their mother tongue, and speak a foreign language habitually and of preference.

‘Thank you,’ Hero said quietly, taking the shawl. Then, after a pause: ‘You do not speak English?’

‘So little that I dare not say I speak. It requires courage to speak the language of Shakspeare.’

‘That is faithfully spoken, that is true, Hero answered, feeling suddenly pleased, and looking up at the speaker with frank shining eyes.

(‘The eyes of a goddess,’ as he explained afterwards, ‘so grave, and calm, and star-like.’)

Like all Russians, Monsieur de Mellin had about him a vague touch of melancholy. He had also a touch of shabbiness or more than a touch. Not the shabbiness of ‘genteel’ poverty as we know it, but rather the shabbiness which comes easily to a man whose official livery is donned all the year round, and whose one suit of *mufti*, worn carefully, or carelessly, during his month’s holiday at foreign watering-places, lasts him ten or fifteen years, and is then, in its owner’s eyes, still a presentable combination of garments; the shabbiness of a man who has no one to please, no one to tell him that his black silk neckerchief is frayed and rusty; that a clothes-brush is a useful implement; that patent leather shoes are gallant attentions to the ladies whose drawing-room carpets he profanes by the dust

he has forgotten to shake off his clumsy boots—the pathetic shabbiness of a man who is alone in the world.

As he stood by her side looking out across the landscape, Hero felt it would be difficult to make or keep up conversation with a person who had to avail himself of a language foreign to both in order to be intelligible; of whose antecedents she knew nothing, and whose appearance and manner were necessarily and absolutely negative.

It was therefore rather in soliloquy, as pursuing the thoughts he had interrupted, that as she turned to look once more at the vast panorama spread out before them she said: ‘It is so strange to think that yonder in those cities, villages, hamlets, homesteads, human hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, loves and losses are going on; that the struggle, and the fight, and the triumph and the loss are all realities—now as we speak, here alone, as if we only were in the world; whereas, down there——’

‘Ah!’ said the Russian, his large, pale blue eyes suddenly catching and concentrating a fiery spark from the rays of the setting sun. ‘Ah, down there! Dear lady, we know little of what goes on “down there!” And it

is we who are ignorant, we who are dull, blind, stupid, cruel. From our heights we overlook those "down there;" they are ants, grubs, worms, moths. Who troubles himself with a microscope to search out the ways of vermin, or follow the vain flight and blind fate of the ephemeræ? Can we alter the decrees of Fate? Can we "bind the influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?" Can we "draw out Leviathan with a hook?" "Down there!" So far off, so low down, so small, dark, and insignificant. Such swarming millions; mere moths dancing in the sunbeams; mere fluttering futilities! "Down there!"

His manner was so strangely unconventional that Hero turned involuntarily from the landscape to look at him. He observed her glance of surprised inquiry. The spark of enthusiasm suddenly died out, and his face was ash-grey, blank, and impassive again, as he said, holding out the shawl: 'Allow me, Madame.'

CHAPTER V.

‘WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.’

‘ABOVE all things don’t talk politics to me,’ said the Baroness, putting her pretty feet on the rung of a chair, and spreading herself out comfortably in a cosy nook under the verandah. ‘You know, *ma chère*, we others, we find it is best to have no politics. I don’t speak for myself. I am frivolous and hate all dry things; but politics are dangerous as well as dry, detrimental as well as dull, and, thank Heaven! I have enough influence with Dimitri to persuade him of the common sense of that. Mellin is utterly ignorant of everything outside Russia.’

‘And yet,’ Hero said, ‘I fancy that Monsieur de Mellin understands more English than he will allow. I noticed that he listened most attentively when my cousin and Mr. Hudson were talking of a working man’s club, to which it seems they both belong.’

‘Renounce that romance, *ma chère* ! Mellin is as ignorant as any other Russian. He may remember the English he learned as a child from his English nurse, as he remembers the German taught by his tutor, mere parrot-polyglottism ; but believe me, the only language he really knows is French. We, who have nothing to hope and everything to fear if we mix ourselves up in politics, love the French language because it is the language of the world, the language of revolution, the language of liberty, not to say of license. We love its audacious literature, its pictures of social life, its outspoken exposure of everything that other tongues use language to disguise. Mellin—look at his face !—is a worn out *viveur*. He has had his day—I don’t say it was a long day—and he knows that he would lose his appointment, an important and lucrative one, the instant he was suspected of being anything more or other than the colourless negative being he seems. To us, a man who meddles with politics means either a Nihilist or a madman. In either case his fate is equally hopeless. Believe me, the silence of the mines is full of a fine moral eloquence ; but why should we talk of dismal things? There!’ and the

small vivacious woman passed her tiny hand swiftly across her eyes, as though banishing an unwelcome vision or dashing away an unbidden tear, 'it was you, *ma chère*, who invoked the Siberian spectre ; and the clanking of his irons makes a dismal discord in this gay and charming scene.'

Hero was silenced, but not convinced.

Since that evening on the terrace of the hunting Schloss, Baron Mellin had been continually in their society. No allusion to his family or circumstances, no hint as to his views, occupations, prejudices, sympathies, regrets or hopes, lifted the veil of reserve that enveloped him. He had come to Sprudelheim to drink the waters. He had drifted into their circle, no one knew exactly how ; he frequented their society, no one troubled himself to guess why. Originating nothing, for the most part silent, never pronouncing an opinion unasked, dumb as to his own personal affairs, his conversation, if conversation it could by courtesy be called, was restricted to the merest frivolous or casual comments on commonplace things of the moment. An observation on some startling toilette, a few words about the 'cure,' a remark as to the music, an acquies-

cent nod if asked to join any expedition to the environs, a general appreciation of the cooking, the company, and the Kur, formed the staple of his daily utterances. The Russian *ljenj* was apparent in all he said and did, or left unsaid and undone.

He was too inoffensive for Dislike to single him out, too courteous to rouse antipathy, too colourless to excite antagonism. Hero had wished more than once to ask Madame de Kerezoff what she knew of his family and connections; whether they, the Kerezoffs and Mellin, were old friends or had now met at Sprudelheim for the first time; but she felt that they had no right to pry into the natural history of one who asked nothing of them, and she told herself that a watering-place acquaintance was too ephemeral in its nature to justify any indiscreet curiosity on her part.

Meanwhile, Monsieur de Mellin’s continual presence in their small daily circle was viewed with anything but feelings of complacency by two of the party.

‘What’s that lean Muscovite hanging about you for, Hero?’ asked her father impatiently one night, when, ignoring Mr. Owen’s very patent attempts to get rid of him, Baron Mellin

had accompanied their party home, and even mounted the stairs common to their own and the Kerezoff household. And Fitzgerald forgave his uncle a whole cargo of sins, hearing him put the question, which was in his own mind though he dared not formulate it.

‘He is going to tea at the Kerezoffs, papa,’ Hero answered coolly; and Bianca added pertly: ‘Don’t be rude, G. P.; everyone can’t be a John Bull.’

‘Our handsome Hero has theories about you,’ Madame de Kerezoff whispered, in perfect English, to Mellin, half an hour after the conversation between the two ladies in the Kur-Garten. ‘These English are so reserved, so cold and reticent, or I think she would have gone on to make inquiries about you, as to your family connections, &c. &c., but I didn’t encourage it.’

Mellin’s ashen-grey face turned a dull purple, but he said nothing. The Marquis of Matlock’s name was on his lips, but it remained unspoken. Why volunteer any information?

‘If I did not know you were fireproof,’ the lady went on glibly, ‘I should suspect you wished to give our Hero brevet-rank as a

heroine—a little bird has whispered to me that you and she have met before.’

A frown clouded her hearer’s brow ; but as nothing audible was interjected into Madame de Kerezoff’s pause expectant, she continued rapidly : ‘ However, that is all nonsense ; fortunately, the oaths which bind us are stronger than those which fail to bind the irresponsible victims of religious enthusiasm. We know that the possible has ceased to exist when we take our vows——’ Again she paused, and her green and shifty glance seemed to glide over Mellin’s face and figure in a serpentine note of interrogation.

‘ Is this a warning, or ’—looking her straight in the face—‘ a threat ? ’ he said slowly.

‘ Oh, neither, *mon cher*, ’ the lady answered in a laughing tone ; and falling at once into the language of their preference, she added, without a pause, nodding her head in the direction of two passers-by : ‘ *Quelles toilettes écrasantes ! il n’y a que les cocottes pour porter ces costumes tapageurs !* ’

But none the less her companion knew he had got his hint. ‘ She is treacherous. She will report me,’ he said to himself ; but aloud he only remarked, without any appearance of

temper or even of annoyance : ‘ After all, in dress as in everything, it is individual taste that tells. Yours is perfect.’

The Baroness looked at him shrewdly, was about to speak, but checked herself, and said : ‘ There is that old fool Owen ; let us take a turn in the gardens. I promised to meet Dimitri at five.’

‘ Yes ! I must be on the move,’ Fitzgerald was saying to Hero. He seemed moody and ill at ease. ‘ I have to see my mother before I return to Oxford.’

The cousins were sitting on the balcony of the Owen’s lodgings. Mrs. Owen was lying on the sofa, just inside the open windows. Mr. Owen and Bianca, with young Hudson, had gone for a walk.

‘ Shall you soon return ? ’ he asked, after a moment’s silence. ‘ I suppose my aunt’s cure is virtually over ? ’

‘ Yes ; for this year. But our plans are still unsettled.’

‘ Do you think it is wise to stay on here ? ’

‘ Wise ? How do you mean ? ’

‘ Well, you must not be offended, you must not think me meddling or impertinent, but Bianca is very young (and, for the matter of

that, so are you), and you are both, both—well, my uncle is so absorbed in his Utopian schemes that he is not as much protection as he might otherwise be ; and all these idle people hanging about ; it seems a pity, just at Bianca’s age, that her education should come so utterly to a standstill.’

Hero flushed. ‘Every one needs a holiday sometimes,’ she said.

‘Of course. Only if it goes on unlimitedly, you know, it ceases to be a holiday ; and Bianca may possibly take a *pli*, a taste for dilatoriness and dawdling, not easy to overcome.’

‘What an admirable father of a family you will make some day, Fitz!’ Hero exclaimed, laughing not unkindly as she looked at him.

The young man coloured. He did not like her ridicule, and she, notwithstanding her laughter, was nettled by his interference.

‘Nevertheless,’ he said, affectionately, ‘it is only my interest in you, Hero, my desire for your happiness that leads me to say this.’

‘I am sure of it!’ she answered cordially, laying her hand with a gesture of cousinly confidence on his. ‘I am *sure* of it, Fitz. Forgive me if I laughed. What you say is true.

I am not altogether easy myself. We have been desultory too long. Idleness demoralises in the long run.'

'May I speak, Hero? May I ask you something? Will you promise not to be angry?'

'I promise.'

'Well, I do not like your surroundings. Who are these Kerezoffs? Who is Mellin? The Prussian officers, after all, are numbered and ticketed: there is a tabulated army list—it would not be difficult to know everything about them, civilly or officially, but, these Russians, who are they? I don't think Madame Kerezoff is a good companion for Bianca.'

'No one can harm Bianca,' affirmed the mother proudly, piqued by the young man's criticism. 'No one.' The colour rushed to her face, and she held her head a little higher than before.

Fitzgerald blundered on. 'Hudson, who is a fair French scholar, told me of a conversation that he had with them one night. As you can see, he is a hot-headed, impetuous boy, as generous as it is possible for a fellow to be. They got money out of him—a considerable sum of money?'

‘Money? Are you sure?’ Hero asked, aghast. ‘Do you mean gambling?’

‘Oh, not for themselves; not to pay their washing and hotel bills; I did not mean that. I don’t insinuate anything necessarily base, but it’s not a satisfactory way for a fellow to drop his coin, even though it be in aid of some philanthropic, humanistic, socialistic society, goodness knows what: “To teach the rising generation of Russians the true meaning of patriotism,” or some such high falutin’. I don’t blame Hudson. I have dabbled a little in this sort of thing myself. But we, we Englishmen,’ Fitzgerald added, rather stiffly, “wear our rue with a difference”: for instance, we draw the line at murder. And they have taught Bianca to use her influence with Hudson in that direction, don’t you know; and that sort of thing.’

‘Impossible!’ Hero said, her face scarlet; ‘it would be too indelicate.’

‘True. Hudson is rich; and, as I need not tell you, he will do whatever Bianca suggests.’

‘Are you certain of what you are saying?’

‘Quite sure. Of course you could not know it. I don’t imply actual harm. But one would rather not—and——’

There was silence for a few minutes. Hero did not help him out of his difficulty by saying in a tone of displeasure, coldly: 'Thank you, for telling me. I had no idea anything of the kind was going on; I will see to it. I hope we shall find there is some mistake.'

'You are not angry with me?'

'Oh, no!'

But he felt that he had perhaps done more harm than good. All sunshine had gone out of her manner. He had annoyed her, and nothing could possibly come of his seeking to mollify her in her present frame of mind, the recent wound still rankling.

'You will let me know how my aunt gets on?'

'Certainly.'

'I fear she suffers more than she says. I am afraid she is really ill, Hero.'

'I think she is much better.'

'Well, perhaps you are right; you must be able to judge better than I. Only, I should never forgive myself if I thought she wanted for anything; and so, if I have said too much——'

'We shall not let mamma want for anything. How can you think so? You are not

complimentary or even kind to-day,' and she rose from her chair as she spoke.

Fitz, by whose bounty, though Hero did not guess it, the invalid enjoyed both the necessities and luxuries of life, knew that again he had made a mistake. There seemed a fatality in his words. 'Do forgive me,' he said, humbly; 'I seem to make nothing but bad shots; it is so sometimes—one blunders unconsciously.'

To this Hero returned no direct answer. 'We will have tea,' she said, and went into the room, where Mrs. Owen awoke from her doze to say a few pleasant farewell words to Fitz on his departure.

'I will not wait for my uncle and Bianca,' he said, as he rose at last to take an unwilling leave. He kissed Mrs. Owen, and stood talking to her for a few minutes, lingering with her hand in his until he felt he must go. Then he stooped and kissed the delicate fingers, wondering at the beauty of the slender, blue-veined, feverish little hand. It was as though a consuming fire burned behind that soft, satiny touch, and he felt the pressure of the small, hot fingers for hours afterwards. Hero followed him to the door. She was serious and pale, but her beautiful eyes were kind and

serene again as she raised them frankly to his face.

She, too, laid her palm confidently in his. There was something about Fitz that made one instinctively rest upon his loyal nature. He was above all petty grudges, yet he felt dispirited at what had passed, and looked so.

‘Can I do anything for you in England?’

‘Nothing.’

‘No messages for friends?’

‘None.’

‘And Graham? When I see him?’

Hero’s face flushed crimson.

‘All that is kind from all of us,’ she said.

‘Nothing more?’

‘No. Our love to aunt.’

‘Of course. Well, then, good-bye. God bless you. Bid Uncle and Bianca farewell for me.’

He stooped and kissed her lightly on her fair broad brow, and the next moment he was gone. He had done his duty. Now, at any rate, his conscience would be clear. He had blundered, but that could not be helped. If Hero read a threat or warning in his mention of Graham, he, Fitz, could look his friend fearlessly in the face, as one man should look

another to whom he is loyal in his secret soul, loyal in thought, as well as in act and in deed. It was not of himself, or of his own pain that he was thinking—indeed, his feelings were altogether of too mixed and vague a character to be recognised—but of Hero's, of her possible displeasure, and of her obvious, if silent, annoyance.

CHAPTER VI.

MOTHER AND SON.

MRS. FITZGERALD, a woman of bitter prejudices and ‘orange’ politics, found it difficult to forgive her son his *cultus* for the Owen family. Of her brother she had always disapproved, as an amateur financier’s prosperous relatives will generally be found to disapprove of the sanguine dabbler in stocks and shares, in bubble companies and ephemeral enterprises who ‘never is, but always to be’ commercially ‘blest.’

Dr. Fitzgerald, a popular Dublin physician of the most successful type, a man who had spent his life in sitting on soft sofas, clasping soft hands, feeling feminine pulses, and uttering sweet and sympathetic nothings, had hidden, behind his waxen mask, a granite character. He had no patriotic weakness for Irish investments, whether in land or industry, but carried

the proceeds of his perseverance and the patronage of the Viceregal Court to the stepmother country, philosophically declaring himself for the 'sweet simplicity of the Three per cents.'

Thus, when the Enemy with whom he had been battling (not without palpable remunerative results) all his life on behalf of others, laid a cold hand upon the Doctor's shoulder, and beckoned him to the region where guineas have no value, the widow, who might otherwise have been inconsolable, found comfort in the reflection that, thanks to the dear departed's prevision, her sublunary course need not be permanently overshadowed, nor, indeed, materially altered; and, as became an appreciative mourner, she made broad the vidual phylacteries accordingly.

Nothing accentuates or emphasises the appreciation of a husband's liberality in respect of pounds, shillings, and pence better than an extra margin of black on the writing-paper, and large and liberal arrangements as to crape and weepers, bugles and bombazine. A poor widow is a very poor object indeed, as no doubt my readers have more than once had occasion, in the course of their pilgrimage through this vale of tears, to remark.

A little of Mrs. Fitzgerald's money, like the superfluous wool on the back of a fat sheep, had been caught by the briars and thorns of her brother's enterprises, and remained hanging dismally on those branches which had promised so goodly a crop of grapes and figs, but had brought forth such a dismal harvest of thorns and thistles.

'Garry' had always been a little afraid of his brother-in-law, and Dr. Fitzgerald had more than once spoken certain truths to his sanguine connection, such as even the most pachydermatous amongst us can scarcely hear and not feel a remote tingling of the hide.

There were no illusions in the Fitzgerald household as to Mr. Owen; and Fitz, from his youth up, had been accustomed to hear unvarnished opinions of his uncle's life and character.

The bitter Protestantism of Mrs. Fitzgerald received a life-long affront in her brother's marriage with Léonie de Courteville, of whom she at once conceived and scrupulously entertained the worst possible opinion, as a Frenchwoman and a 'Papist.' She even went to the length of speaking of her brother as 'poor Garry,' for several months after his marriage,

and when he and his bride were in town, further accentuated her attitude by inviting him to dinner *en garçon*, in order to testify her sympathy with his fallen condition, and proclaim her protest as regarded the Scarlet Lady. He took good care not to tell Léonie that she was ignored in the note of invitation; persuaded her that a slight headache was a thing to be nursed; and set off, in high dudgeon, to dine alone in Portland Place. But, on the road thither, he reflected that, by judicious amiability, he might extract something in the shape of a wedding present from his opulent relative, and then determined to put a good face upon the matter.

‘Léonie is very sorry, but sight-seeing has given her such a splitting headache, I advised her to go to bed, and undertook to make her excuses,’ he said, airily; and Mrs. Fitzgerald frowned at the device, whilst the Doctor, who knew nothing of his wife’s rudeness, and had a weakness for pretty women (he had been told that Léonie was that, and something more), expressed unfeigned disappointment at the bride’s non-appearance. Garry went home with a Bible in one pocket and a ten-pound note in the other. The kindly

Doctor surreptitiously slipped the note into his hand, begging him, as he stood a moment with the bridegroom on his own doorstep, to buy some present with it for his wife.

The Bible Léonie received with a look of melancholy bewilderment, which caused her husband to burst into shouts of laughter. About the ten-pound note, it is superfluous to say, she heard nothing at all.

‘After all, you and Susan are best apart,’ was Mr. Owen’s summing-up of the situation. ‘She is as bitter and harsh as a March wind, and her aggressive Protestantism is simply disgusting.’

The episodes of Hero’s birth and baptism served to point Mrs. Fitzgerald’s fierce morality, and adorn the tale of her grievances. ‘Hero? Why Hero?’ she, not unnaturally, asked. ‘I thought a hero was a man—something in Greek or Roman history? But I suppose it’s part of the woman’s paganism.’

There was a volume of Shakspeare in the house, but it may be doubted if anything in the pages of that profane writer, or in Herrick’s story of the Hellespontine lovers, could have reconciled Mrs. Fitzgerald to the choice of her little niece’s name. And Hero’s marriage with

an Italian put the finishing stroke to her aunt's accumulated prejudices.

‘What can you expect?’ she said, ‘of a pack of intriguing foreigners and papists? They are all Jesuits in disguise. No doubt her mother has arranged the whole thing, and the alternative would have been a convent; for I am told that is what becomes of all portionless women in foreign countries.’

Martello, or *dei Martelli*, were sounds her lips refused to form. ‘Towers, I believe, is the plain English of it;’ she would answer angrily if pressed home upon the uncongenial subject, ‘but really I know nothing about them. Marchese, you say? Some beggarly foreign title, I suppose. I believe in those countries any chimney-sweeper, cheesemonger, or Jew usurer may buy a title for forty pounds. The whole thing was her mother’s doing. She would not have liked a wholesome Englishman for a son-in-law.’

Thus justly are we judged by those whom the world may suppose to be best informed as to our actions and the motives from which they spring.

And as Fitz sits in the great gloomy drawing room of the Portland Place mansion,

manifold past experiences recur to his mind, and tell him he may expect a very bad quarter of an hour.

‘So you’ve come at last!’ is Mrs. Fitzgerald’s gracious greeting.

‘Did not you get my letter, mother?’

‘I had a line from Brussels, if that’s what you mean.’ Then, after a pause she asks: ‘Are you going to Brighton with me?’

‘I am due at Oxford on the 8th, you know.’

‘Of course, it is as you like.’

‘If you will have me until then, I shall be delighted to go down with you.’

Brighton is the place of all others that Fitz abhors. Mother and son have compared notes on this point before. The discussion is one better avoided if there be a desire for, or a prospect of, peace.

But this armed neutrality is not destined to last, and although ‘forewarned’ is, proverbially, ‘forearmed,’ Fitz could not but confess that at the game of parry and thrust Mrs. Fitzgerald was an expert. Then, too, she was his mother, and that effectually sealed his lips where loyalty did not call upon him to open them.

‘What sort of a creature is that wretched

child growing up?' the lady asked of her son, when reclining on the post-prandial couch, the evening of their arrival at Brighton, she felt that the hour for confidences had arrived.

'If you mean Bianca, mother, she is neither "wretched," nor a "child."'

'Precocious minx! she takes after her mother, who ought to be ashamed to have a girl of that age. It's simply scandalous. However, that was your aunt's doing.'

'They do look more like sisters,' Fitz provokingly replies, with a sort of veiled complacency. 'People were very curious about them at Sprudelheim. They created quite a sensation in a small way.'

'I wouldn't give much for the taste of a pack of foreigners, though I can believe it was in a very small way.'

'Why a "pack" mother?' said Fitz, smiling. 'Do you think they lived in kennels? But their admirers were not only foreigners. I can assure you the English quite followed, if they did not give, the lead, and, as a nation, we are spoiled in the matter of beauty, you know.'

'And gave them a wide berth, too, at the same time, I dare say.'

‘Indeed, no. Mrs. Hudson—you remember Hudson? Mrs. Hudson and her sister, Lady Gifford, were greatly taken with Bianca, and Hudson himself, poor fellow, was quite over head and ears.’

‘Designing little wretch; she ought to be in the schoolroom or the nursery.’

‘Mother!’ said Fitz, laughing heartily and determined to keep his temper, ‘you can have no idea of Bianca to think the child “designing” in the sense you mean. And as for being in the “nursery” or “schoolroom,” one solitary creature like that, shut up in a nursery or a schoolroom, would pine like a lonely bird in a cage, missing its mate. Bianca is here, there, and everywhere, like a butterfly in the sunshine. She is the very light of Hero’s eyes; she amuses her grandfather and gives my poor aunt a taste of that happy youth which, I suspect, was never hers nor Hero’s?’

Yet, as he spoke, certain things arose in his memory, and he wished the conversation had not taken this turn.

‘Oh! as to that,’ said Mrs. Fitzgerald viciously, ‘who can say what Mrs. Owen’s youth was?’

She had never forgiven Léonie’s beauty and

distinction, her exquisite manner, her gentle breeding, and her accomplishments. The Doctor, perhaps, had had a sly pleasure in speaking of his sister-in-law's attractions *en connoisseur*.

‘If you knew how ill she is, you would speak less harshly, mother,’ Fitz said, his honest face crimsoning with suppressed annoyance. He was so tender towards women, himself, had such reverence for, and faith in, the ‘eternal womanly,’ that to him it was a mystery how one of these sacred and gifted creatures could wilfully attack and hurt another of its own species.

‘Indeed, I should do nothing of the kind, Fitz,’ his mother answered angrily. ‘You will not get me to conform to your Owen-worship, and so I tell you at once. They are a disreputable set, from beginning to end ; one as bad as another, and all a disgrace to their connections. You have chosen to throw me over, and to go and spend all your holiday in some obscure German watering-place, the rendezvous of the worst characters in Europe, and to attach yourself exclusively to people you know I detest ; and then you expect me to admire and take an interest in them, because, forsooth !

a hotheaded young fool like that Hudson is taken in by them, an old imbecile like his mother is weak enough to encourage her son in his folly, and people like the Giffords, who run after eccentricity of all sorts, are silly enough to flatter them to the top of their bent.' And Mrs. Fitzgerald, snorting indignantly, fanned herself with an air of vehement reprobation.

'Mrs. Hudson looked on Bianca as a child; a charming, beautiful, innocent playfellow for her son, and—whatever the girl's mother may have had to say to it—you must excuse me if I confess that I think the boy's mother was very wise. Both Bianca and Hudson were surrounded by their respective families and friends; and the mother who makes home pleasant to her sons by gathering fresh, innocent, well-bred girls about her, does a wise thing; for graceful virtue is the best antidote to vice; and such things keep youth more effectually from harm than all the "Wise saws and modern instances" morality can quote.'

'That's right! Blame me! Go on! Blaspheme religion! I quite understand your insinuation as to these model mothers. Perhaps you will tell me that Her—— Mrs. Towers is a model mother, too!'

‘Hero is a perfect mother!’ Fitz cried, with conviction, ‘and I should not be a man if I could sit by and hear her abused!’

‘A fine perfection! a woman who left her husband to go upon the stage; a woman who has been before the public of every capital in Europe and America; a woman who is nameless, homeless, husbandless. And you call her a “perfect” mother, and you neglect your own for her, and insult your own, your widowed mother, on her account! Have I not every reason to hate her, and her mother, and her daughter, and all her works and ways?’ cried Mrs. Fitzgerald, outraged by her son’s enthusiasm.

‘You are mistaken, mother,’ Fitzgerald said, coldly.

‘Mistaken? It is you who are infatuated! Upon my word, I believe it is the mother, not the girl, you are in love with: a woman old enough to be your mother.’

‘I know Hero’s age.’

‘I dare say. I dare say she has no secrets from you. How much money has she got out of you this time? You blush, and well you may, to waste your father’s hardly-gained earnings on such a crew!’

‘Stop, mother ; even you must not go too far. Hero would not accept a farthing from me. I should not dare to offer her money, nor can I imagine the person who would.’

‘How can they afford to travel about, to educate that hobbledehoy of a girl, to pay Mrs. Owen’s doctor’s bills?’

‘I have never asked them.’

‘As for your uncle, if you had the slightest spark of filial affection you would not associate with him ; he has swindled me out of hundreds. I dare say they are living on my money at the present moment.’

Fitz, who knew to the contrary, made no reply to this. He thought the conversation had gone far enough, and regretted the turn it had taken. From his aunt he knew the truth.

With the first arrest of the final summons already upon her, Léonie had opened her heart to the friendly, considerate, kind, chivalrous young fellow, who, from the first hour of their acquaintance, had been uniformly tender and affectionate towards her. A woman, no matter her age, always knows instinctively where she is loved and appreciated, and a French woman, with her quick sympathies and sensitive insight, sooner, perhaps, than any other. She could

see in his honest eyes that he admired and loved her; she could feel his affection in the arm that supported her feebleness, in the hand that guided her steps, in the care that placed her chair, settled her cushions, brought her the book or the flowers which he thought would suit her best. And then they had another bond of union; secret, known only to themselves, and seldom alluded to in so many words by either.

Graham!

‘Hero would never forgive me, my dear boy,’ she said, ‘but I must tell you, so that when I am gone *one* may know; one at least. I make you the depositary of truth, doubly sacred as it will then be by the eternal silence of the speaker, that you may testify for her [should the need ever arise] who will then be for ever dumb. Martello was an unspeakable villain. My child loved him in an innocent, unknowing, trusting sort of way. His appearance, his caressing lively manners, his knowledge of the world, his irreproachable *tenue*, all roused an interest in the girl’s mind, attracted her ambition, dazzled her imagination. Experience she had, and could have, none. The attentions of a man, nearer fifty than forty, could not but flatter a young creature scarcely

out of the schoolroom. He was engaged with her father in endless speculations; they were thrown together; he talked to her of Italy, of art, of society, of the world—the world that she longed to see; and loving him for these fair promises, for his flatteries, for all the qualities wherewith a girl's fancy invests her love, she married him in spite of all I could do and say to the contrary. Alas! it was little enough. It was too little, I have told myself over and over again. I should have prevented it at whatever, at any cost. My child did not know what she was doing. No sooner were they married than Martello told her the truth; told her that he did not believe in love, otherwise than as a youthful disease, which, like the measles or the rose-rash, had to be got over, and then need trouble one no more: told her that she must understand her position to him as that of a partner in a mercantile house. They were to do their duty to one another for the good of the firm. She was to use her abilities in his service; her fresh young beauty was to attract and secure new clients; she was to play the agreeable, make his home respectable by the care she bestowed upon every detail, and to understand that the atten-

tions he had paid her, very proper before marriage, would be altogether ridiculous, out of place, preposterous between man and wife. Mercifully the human heart and brain are so constituted that they are only susceptible of a certain amount of misery. My poor Hero still had the illusion of a generous young mind—she did not realise the utter shipwreck she had made at once. She thought she was working for her father's and my good ; that if we grew rich and prosperous by her means she would have our blessings for all the ease of our later life. And then she, so used to love, so fed and nurtured and nourished on love, believed fondly that at the bottom of his heart her husband did love her ; or, if he did not—why, then, so she whispered to herself, he should. Her youth, with which he taunted her, should be no drawback ; she would grow sedate and serious in pleasing him. Naturally, a man so much older would be tenacious, lest his friends might accuse him of weakness towards a young wife. She, who had accepted the semblance of love as a right, now set herself to conquer love the reality, as a guerdon. Even her father saw that Martello treated her in a manner that nothing could excuse, that he tried

to make a stranger of her, keeping her at arm's length, tutoring, criticising, and reproving her, until the girl grew dumb, dull, dispirited and weary. There were words—I cannot repeat them—between her husband and her father, and '—here Mrs. Owen paused, and the tears which had been gathering in her eyes rolled slowly down her pallid cheek, and fell upon the hand Fitz held in his. The young man stooped and kissed them away.

'Another time, aunt,' he said, 'you are not strong enough; it will make you ill.'

'After that—some time after—Bianca was born. Fitz, how can I tell you? I was with her, and we never thought she could live through it. The doctor said she needed hope, the mainspring of life to most young wives and mothers; she did not seem to rally: as they lay side by side in the bed, mother and child looked like two waxen images. Martello was in more than ordinary money difficulties, and very angry about the arrival of this inopportune little creature. He seldom came near his wife. I was glad he left her alone. But on the seventh day after Bianca's birth the pressure from without, whatever it may have been, became more persistent, and he applied

to me. I had no money either to give or lend him. He went to Hero. As time passed and he did not rejoin me I began to think he must have left the house. I trembled for all this excitement and its effect upon my poor girl. I opened the door, and the sound of altercation reached me. Hero's voice was so faint it was but an indistinct murmur. Suddenly a piercing shriek rang through the house, then all was still. I stood rooted to the spot. Then I ran towards Hero's room. Martello came striding past me. I went on. As I entered the bedroom Hero snatched her baby from the bed where it lay beside her, and held its little face to hers. The nurse took it from her, and as my poor girl fell back upon the pillow I saw that her face bore the fiery imprint of five fingers in flaming outrage on her pale cheek. The Italian nurse, half frantic, gesticulated, wept, and raved, and called all the saints to witness that she was not responsible if her mistress died, for how could she make a good recovery? Hero did not speak a word. . . . That night she told me that she had given Martello all her jewels long since, and that he had desired her to write to her relations for money. Alas! the poor child knew we had

nothing. "Then find some one who has something," he said, and suggested a rich sister of Mr. Owen's, of whom he had heard. But Hero explained that she did not know this lady, and that to apply to her would only be to expose him to lowering remarks, which for honour's sake she must avoid. He said it was a beggarly pride that would sacrifice her husband to these considerations, and that he no longer requested—he commanded. Hero said that when she was better she would write to her uncle. "No! Dealings with men," he said, "were better avoided on occasions of this sort." Hero must write to her aunt; and her selfishness in talking of "when she would be better" was on a par with the rest of her conduct. She must write for the money now, at once, to-day, and, seeing she hesitated, he added furiously: "Now, or never!" "Then——Never!" Hero cried, all her nerves tingling with excitement, and no longer mistress of herself, and the blow fell in response upon her upturned face. The little baby pined, wailing night and day; and its mother sat looking at it with large tearless eyes, and said nothing. "Why should it live?" she asked wearily. My heart felt broken. I

wrote to your uncle, and at last help, in the shape of money, came. When Hero saw Bianca in her peasant nurse's arms the spell was broken, the merciful tears came, and mother and babe were saved. Martello had gone into hiding from his creditors. He did not write, which was fortunate, but the time of peace seemed too good to last, and I daily dreaded his return.

‘An old friend of the house, a Roman artist, coming on Hero and her child, fell into ecstasies about them, and said his fortune was made if she would pose for the Madonna he was commissioned to paint for some country church. The purity of the young mother was what he had dreamed but despaired of realising. Hero consented. The picture made a *furore*; the thing got noised abroad, and when Martello came home, he found that Hero was in a sense the celebrity of the hour. The Italians used to rave about her. She was so serious, solemn, and sad; so young, fragile, and tender, that she really did seem fitly to represent some sacred mystery.

‘Then, what she had done for love, Martello insisted she could also do for money. She revolted, resisted, rebelled, and—submitted. It was a shame and a horror to her. One day

Hero arrived in London. For a week she scarcely spoke. The journey and her trouble had almost killed her. Martello had engaged in fresh schemes ; new victims were to be lured into the brilliant net ; he took an apartment, and desired Hero to send out cards for receptions. She was to smile upon the men, please them, inveigle them. His family, one of the most honourable in Italy, had long ago refused to recognise him. No more room for illusions ; his wife's *rôle* was clearly defined by him. I cannot tell you what passed between them, but Hero borrowed a little money of the old Italian artist, bound him down to secrecy and came straight home. She told me she would never go back to Martello, and she never did, nor could I blame her resolve. She changed her name (so as to annoy her relatives as little as possible), and her extraordinary musical talents shortened the time of probation by more than half.

‘ The first time she sang in public (it was for charity at a concert in the English Embassy at Rome) all Hero’s old artist friends were there ; they gave her a true Italian reception. It was a great success. She is not so very different perhaps now from what she was then ;

only that a sort of ardent fire which was not excitement nor even enthusiasm seemed burning within her. From that time forward we were fairly prosperous. During the season Hero sang in London, and then she lived with us. Her income sufficed to educate her child and to keep them both in tolerable comfort. Her husband never recognised her under the name she adopted. My delicate health made the Italian winters very welcome to me; it was then that—that Graham’she paused and went on hurriedly—‘your uncle talked of getting a divorce for Hero, but there were difficulties. A woman, on marriage, adopts her husband’s nationality. Legally Hero was an Italian, and in Italy there was no divorce law. We were so afraid that in the event of his discovering she was making money, he might take the child, which was legally his, from her, that we lived in fear and trembling. But at last news came that Bianca was fatherless, and my poor Hero once more free!’

Fitz found nothing to say in answer to these confidences, and yet Mrs. Owen felt he understood them. ‘Hero has never offered an explanation to anybody,’ her mother went on, ‘not that she was too proud to justify her-

self, but "My life must be my explanation," is what she has always said. And so it has been. I suppose it is because she is without reproach that she is so entirely without fear. "*You* know, mother, and that is enough," was her invariable reply. But, when I am gone, no one will know, no one can know (as I did), all the days of her life and the hours of her days. Her father is—he does not understand—and besides he was not with her as I was. He is very proud of her, of her beauty, and of her success; but he is vexed that, loathing and hating publicity with an almost morbid hatred, she has shrunk from recognition, and has steadily persisted in withdrawing from professional life. He says, perhaps not unjustly, that she might be earning her thousands, and he ascribes her repugnance to pride and obstinacy, whilst he believes, now she is free, that she might easily make what he calls "a brilliant marriage." Hero will never sing in public again. I know her reasons. They include more than I dare say—even to you—and I approve them. You, who are her only relative—for my people are all dead, and the income Hero enjoys she derives from the de Courteville property which my brother, dying in Canada, left to her—you

must be as a brother to her—a younger brother, it is true, but what of that? I shall feel happier to have told you this if you promise me that, when I am gone, should occasion arise you will defend her from slander as emphatically as I myself could do. She is still young, and Bianca seems an anxious care to be laid on her weak shoulders. You can defend and protect her as a younger brother might.’

It was after this conversation, prophetic of future trouble, that Fitzgerald had ventured to say to Hero that he thought her mother feeble, and that the change in her was for the worse. Something like unreasonable resentment had stirred Hero’s heart, as the sharp stab of pain, foretelling bereavement, ran through her at his words. Could he know how cruel he was in speaking thus? Was fresh trouble coming? Must he needs prophesy evil as though that of the day were not sufficient unto itself? And her answer showed Fitz that she was vexed and angry with him for what she deemed the superfluous cruelty of his remarks.

‘These were the matters revolving in Fitz’s mind as he sat silently awaiting his mother’s next words.

‘Don’t let us talk about them, since we

can't agree,' said she, after a long pause, stretching out her hand to ring the bell for tea.

‘With all my heart,’ Fitz replied; ‘we will agree to differ.’

His mother's harsh voice startled him out of the reverie which had transported him to Sprudelheim, and put to definite flight the visions of grace and beauty that, but now, had peopled his dreams.

CHAPTER VII.

‘THE GOOD CAUSE.’

‘It is for the good Cause,’ said Mellin.

The short autumnal day was drawing to a close. Mr. Owen, Hero, and Bianca were dauntlessly performing their ‘constitutional’ in cork soles and waterproofs.

The mist hung heavy on the dim outline of the hills ; the drip of the trees sounded cheerless, as by forest paths they climbed the steep ascent to the ruined Burg.

The Kerezoffs had left Sprudelheim. The Hudsons had left. The diligence had ceased to ply between the spa and the post-town. The hotels were shut up, the lodging-houses deserted, but the Owens were still detained by the state of Mrs. Owen’s health. After a long fine summer the weather had completely broken up, and the doctor would not at present sanction any attempt to move the invalid.

Hero, who had rather dreaded the effect on Bianca of the departure of all her playfellows, was agreeably surprised by the cheerful philosophy with which the girl accepted the situation. It was true that Lord and Lady Gifford and their daughter had arranged to await their arrival in Brussels, and that Mrs. Hudson had Hero's promise to pay them a visit in their Sussex home before the expiration of the year; that the Kerezoffs talked of coming to London next spring, and that all the Prussian officers had assured Bianca (*sous toutes les reserves*) that they intended pilgrimages of politeness to the country of their supremest abhorrence and contempt. Yet these were but prospective advantages, not calculated to meet what, Hero feared, would be the blank and the *désœuvrement* of the present. Nevertheless, Bianca's gaiety remained undimmed; nor had even the parting with Reggie Hudson a more than passing effect upon her cheerful mood. The old people viewed with not uncomplacent eyes the growing intimacy of the boy and girl lovers. Mrs. Hudson, subdued by Bianca's capable ways and evident influence on her son, had whispered a word to the girl's mother. Hero had smiled, but made no direct reply. She

would keep her child if she could ; but, remembering her own miserable youth, and their present unprotected condition, she would not selfishly interfere with her girl's happiness, if happiness for Bianca should be found to lie in that direction. Reggie Hudson was a thoroughly good fellow ; as little spoiled as the circumstances allowed, and as much in love as a romantic young gentleman accustomed to have his own way in all things could possibly be. Meantime they were both but big children, and a Midsummer holiday's dream does not necessarily develop into domesticity of the permanent placid order, or prolific type. The young man must see the world, and the girl must have the opportunity of making comparisons. True love is scarcely compatible with such smooth running as the immature circumstances denoted ; and the elders were all prudently silent as to what was passing before their eyes and in their minds.

'It is for the good Cause,' said Mellin again, in his peculiarly inexpressive, level manner. His voice, veiled, thin and monotonous in tone, was, when raised above its usual diapason, like the voice of an invalid or peevish person, strained and harsh. It had so little 'carrying'

quality that only the person specially addressed could catch what he said.

He was now standing with Bianca on a small natural platform made by a landslip on the hill-side, overlooking Sprudelheim, some fifty feet below the ruined castle that crowned the summit. A bench had been placed there by the Society farming the waters, and it was a favourite point for the post-prandial promenades of pedestrian Sprudelheimers. To-day the view, like Baron Mellin's voice, was veiled; effaced in fog and mist; and the universe seemed to be restricted to the small space of *terra firma* visible at their feet.

Bianca had declared to her companions that they must take leave of the scene of their summer exploits from this spot; and, agile and fleet of foot, she had succeeded in outstripping her mother and grandfather.

Mr. Owen, short and scant of breath, was uttering Falstaffian laments, as puffing and blowing he stopped to pull out a scarlet silk handkerchief, and mop his illuminated countenance. The thick close autumnal mist was oppressively stifling amongst the trees. Once or twice Mellin appeared to pause, as though politeness demanded the party should remain,

as it had started, together. But Bianca continued her ascent with conviction, disdaining even the semblance of waiting; and, after a moment's apparent irresolution, he followed his energetic guide without proffering either remark or remonstrance.

Now that they had fairly outstripped the others and got a good five minutes' start of them, it was again Bianca who took the initiative.

She stopped, and Mellin simply acquiesced in the pause. The girl looked at him with large, inquiring, anxious eyes, and seemed about to ask a question, but checked herself. Time was very precious. Twice he had said it was for the good Cause, as though to impress it on her mind.

'I know,' she answered, almost humbly.

The swiftness of their movements had sent the blood coursing through her veins, and given her pale Italian skin an unwonted tinge of colour. Her eyes were bright, and large with a strange, half-veiled expectancy, as they rested anxiously, impatiently and yet timidly on Mellin's inscrutable countenance. Then, as he made no sign, not even looking in her face, she said hurriedly: 'Have you brought it? You do not speak.'

‘Is it safe to speak?’

‘Of course it is safe; only we must be quick. There will be no better time. But it is short. Julie said I might depend on your bringing it.’

‘Madame de Kerezoff is very prudent—for herself,’ Mellin added in a lower note. There was no bitterness in his tone. He was merely stating a fact. It was doubtful whether Bianca understood. She looked at him with a puzzled air. ‘This is my only chance,’ she said; ‘grandpapa is determined, fine or rainy, we shall go to-morrow, and then’—her voice suddenly changed, and the lids were lowered over her eager eyes, whilst her cheek lost its vivid, delicate pink.

‘Well, then, I suppose what must be, must,’ her companion answered. ‘You know the conditions, you understand what they include? You are alive to all the gravity of their import? You are to be trusted? Remember, it is only step by step that one arrives at a full knowledge of the responsibilities undertaken, but you must realise these responsibilities step by step too. He who is admitted to the antechamber is still distant from the throne-room. The pilgrim must not falter

even though he learn by painful stations how far the altar of his desires is from the porch that first admits him to a distant view of the shrine.'

'I know.'

'Does your mother guess or suspect anything?'

'Nothing.'

'Of that you are sure? That, if need were, you could swear?'

'Solemnly.'

'And you bind yourself by a triple oath of Secrecy, Self-sacrifice, and Service?'

'I do.'

'Then take it my child, and remember your duty to your brothers and sisters—brethren in the Bond.'

He opened his left hand, and showed Bianca a small silver ornament depending from a black chain.

Two clasped hands holding a heart, upon which was graven in strange characters: 'To Eternity.' The obverse of the medallion showed a death's head, grinning hideously beneath a crown, and a curious cabalistic sign, of which Bianca did not understand the meaning.

It was not a very 'gallant' ornament for a

man to give a beautiful young girl ; but Bianca seized it eagerly.

‘ When you look at this, night and morning, you will remember, with joy and pride, that you are admitted one of us. The heart symbolises devotion to the Cause ; the clasped hands, indissoluble union with it ; the words “ To Eternity,” that you, and all you have, and all you are, or may have, and shall be, are OURS. The death’s head is typical of the “ next future ;” of that oppression and tyranny which two thousand centuries of wrong have crowned, throned, and anointed in the name of “ God and Right.” The figure beneath represents a reckoning, for the amount of which the science of numerals has accepted no sign. It shadows forth millions, like the sands of the seashore for multitude, whose ghastly shades people the Hades of history, the victims of immemorial wrong.’

Terrible words, uttered as calmly and with as little expression as the merest conventional commonplace.

Nevertheless, nothing daunted, Bianca moved a step nearer. ‘ This is my altar,’ she said, laying one slender hand on a huge boulder that, perilously poised, overhung the valley,

whilst she slightly raised the other ; ‘and on this rock I swear allegiance to all I know, and to all I do not know, that may be, and that is, included in my vows of faith and service.’

She looked rather like some young inspired priestess of an ancient faith, invoking her gods with mystic rites upon the wild hill-side altar, than a young English girl of the present prosaic period, of the conventional commonplace type. But, indeed, Bianca’s Italian blood, the fusion of nationalities, and confusion of strain, that coursed through her veins, told seriously against the middle-class ‘conveniences’ of which her ostensible life might be supposed the natural outcome.

‘Now, put the medal round my neck,’ she said ; again, as always, taking the initiative ; ‘and let me realise in silence all the immensity of my privileges.’ There was real enthusiasm in her tone, and she did not attempt to conceal it, though even to herself her language sounded stilted and grandiloquent.

Mellin obeyed her bidding.

She shut her eyes and held her breath with an air of intense ‘recollection.’

Two words recalled her to herself.

Mellin murmured : ‘Your mother.’

‘Why do you race on in such a ridiculous way to this beastly dripping dog-hole?’ said Mr. Owen, angrily. ‘You, Bianca, are as ghastly pale as I am red; and you, Baron, would have done better not to follow the lead of a romp in such a wild-goose chase. You should have stopped with us old sober-sides. Hero, shall you be afraid to sit down for a minute?’

Baron Mellin was no favourite of Mr. Owen. He thought him a needy adventurer, a dull companion, a beggarly would-be gentleman, with nothing but a doubtful title and a shabby suit of clothes to emphasise his pretensions. Tom Tiddler resents even the bare suspicion that outsiders contemplate an irruption on his world-famous grounds for the purpose of picking up the gold and silver that, of right, ought to be T. T.’s alone. If the great copper mines were floated, Kerezoff would insist on giving this shabby-genteel threadbare-coated compatriot of his a portion of the pickings; and, the more sharers, the less pickings would be the obviously unpleasing result.

With Bianca, Mellin had spoken rapidly in fluent English, almost without an accent. To Mr. Owen he replied in a few halting, entangled

sentences, which that gentleman did not give himself the trouble to comprehend.

'Why did you race on at such a rate?' Hero asked, reprovingly.

'On the contrary, motherkin, you crawled like two caterpillars. Besides, what good could our crawling in company have done?'

'It is sometimes better to do a thing in company,' was Mr. Owen's sententious reply. 'I suppose, having got up, we had better go down again. But no running away this time, Miss Bianca.'

'Who wants to run away?' said the young lady, not in the most respectful of tones.

'Bianca!' said her mother, rising hastily from the dripping stone on which she had seated herself.

They were all cross, damp, and uncomfortable; and the presence of a stranger made the situation anything but pleasant. Fortunately (two of the party thought) he did not understand English, and the finer tones of family discord would be lost upon him.

'Might I venture to offer you my arm?' blandly asked the Baron of Hero.

As a foreigner he deemed the familiarity sanctioned by the slipperiness of the descent.

The offer was decidedly apologetic in tone. Hero thought it better to take Mellin's arm frankly, and as a matter of course. She felt as though some concession were due to this unobtrusive stranger for the inexplicable ill-humour of the family party; and she good-naturedly wished to convey that the national 'spleen' was in fault rather than individual idiosyncrasy.

The slippery stones and greasy earth made the descent difficult; now and again Hero slid, but, with a little cry, recovered her equilibrium. The Baron checked her fall by a judicious, yet tender, pressure of the arm. This, so often as it happened, annoyed her, and she was glad when, at last, level ground gave her the opportunity of withdrawing her hand.

'The privilege is one I shall not forget, though I owe it to mere casual circumstances,' he said, in his customary inexpressive melancholy voice. 'I, madame, speak from an isolated position, and my words have therefore all the more, and all the less, meaning. But now that we are about to part I may say that I have watched you with the eyes of respectful enthusiasm, but I have not dared to ask for your friendship. The world, Life, has not shown me any other woman altogether such as you.'

'You are very kind,' Hero answered, stiffly, as though it were a mere passing compliment he had paid her. In truth she was indignant and amazed beyond words at the personality of his tone.

The very turn of his sentence was ill-chosen; there is always something offensive in being 'watched.' *Au reste*, of what consequence whether he approved her or no? What he said was in the worst possible taste and utterly uncalled for. His opinion was without weight and his compliments without consequence. They might not be meant impertinently, but they were impertinent all the same.

'You are not offended? I hope you are not offended?' he asked, reading her countenance aright.

'Certainly not. Only we will change the conversation, if you please.' The annoyance her words disclaimed her tone sufficiently conveyed.

She expected him to understand that he was dismissed, and it was with surprise she heard him begin *de novo* :—

'My experience of the world is perhaps the only possession of value that I have. You will think me deficient in tact, but I hope you

will forgive me if I say that, though you have no faults, you have one failing.'

'And that is——?' Hero asked, like a true woman, her attention arrested by the fact of his putting her under the microscope.

'You do not know how to command.'

'To command? Where? When? Whom? I have no need to command. I obey my parents and my child obeys me.'

'Pardon me. You ask, as a favour, things which you should demand as a right. Therefore you will always be the victim of coarser, more selfish, more unscrupulous, though not necessarily, "stronger," natures.'

Some slight twinge of remorse, immediately suppressed, probably inspired the ill-timed remark. She understood some particular hint, concealed in these vague generalities, but she failed to apply the words; and this attempt by a stranger to penetrate, uninvited, into her personal life offended her.

'I suppose it is a mere compliment to ask you to come in?' she said.

The doubtful hospitality was not accepted.

'Then it is good-bye,' she continued, as they reached the gate. In answer to Mellin's elaborate bow she held out her hand, adding

in an indifferent tone : ‘ *A la mode de Bretagne !* a bow is too ceremonious when it means Farewell ! ’

He murmured something which she did not understand ; and with what Hero thought a ridiculous affectation of gallantry in a man who hitherto had barely recognised the fact of her existence, uncovered and bareheaded, stooped and kissed her extended hand.

‘ You should say, like the Austrians, Baron, “ I kiss the hand,” and let the word stand for the deed,’ said Mr. Owen, who piqued himself on knowing the world, and boasted that he could tell a man’s nationality by the way he walked into a room.

‘ Good-bye, Baron, *et bon voyage !* ’

Bianca came last.

‘ Adieu, Mademoiselle ! ’

‘ *A rivederlà !* ’ she cried, looking him steadfastly in the face for a moment, as she followed her mother into the house.

Mellin had carefully abstained from using words of farewell. ‘ We shall meet again,’ he said to himself, as he looked up at the blank windows, ‘ but When, and Where ? ’

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM ROME TO OXFORD.

‘Brussels, Nov. 27, 18—

‘MY DEAR FITZ,—Here we are still at Brussels, and as our neighbours say, “*pour cause*.” Now that your aunt is better, nothing prevents our getting under weigh but the *de quoi*. My dividends are not paid till the New Year, and I don’t like to worry Hero about money, as she has paid all our expenses for the past six weeks, and is fretting over the loss of what she had—fortunately not much—in the Bastwick Bank. If you, like a dear fellow, could oblige me with a loan of fifty pounds, I will send you an I.O.U. for the amount, and wipe off my indebtedness at the turn of the year. My wife and the girls don’t know I am writing or they would send their love.

‘Your affectionate uncle, G. O.’

Fitz smiled as he drew a cheque for a

hundred pounds, and enclosed it to his uncle. He did not hope that the extra fifty would repay Hero, but it was some comfort to him to give his uncle the chance of making restitution to the widow and the orphan.

Oxford, in a dripping November, is not a cheerful city, though, no doubt, the wisdom within its walls goes far to redeem the damp without, and to rescue its inhabitants from that *ennui* which is said, by French novelists, to induce the autumnal batch of British suicides.



The Christchurch Meadows were under water and Magdalen walks deserted. The waiters at the 'Clarendon,' pasting their pallid countenances against the windows, and looking out disconsolately at the martyr monument over the way, were disposed to envy Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley the dryness and warmth of their final exit, as they tried to "fleet the time" by counting the Taylorian visitors. Students in the Bodleian grumbled at the early darkness that fell upon their labours; Mr. Ruskin's army of amateur labourers had abandoned 'spade and wheel' and 'the ethics of the dust' in sheer despair of coping with the morals of the mud; all the 'Heads' had

bronchitis; the Keble men had taken on a deeper shade of priggishness, and the Balliol men a livelier tinge of arrogance; the Debating Club had degenerated into a bear-garden, or had at best become a mere theatre for cub-wrangling (in the non-academical sense); the plodding men wearily wending their homeward way were met, virtuous and unsightly, in dripping mackintoshes and impossible shoes, carrying out the 'constitutional' of the conscientious, despite the adverse elements. The idlers and swaggerers, the rufflers and swash-bucklers, out of sheer *désœuvrement*, had taken out a new diploma of rowdiness, whilst now and again a don, with a degenerate 'gamp,' would glide surreptitiously past a noisy group in terror for his gingham.

It was the weather to make a misanthrope take out a new lease of hatred against his fellow-creatures, Fitz thought; and for the tame-cat species to yearn with ardent if futile longings for feminine companionship, sweetness and light within doors, in place of sloppiness and fog without—for bright, cheering domestic grace and happiness, that is as the promised Paradise to the solitary celibate. If his hundred pounds would bring the Owen

to England, they would be well laid out, he thought; for he was anxious (with an almost superstitious apprehension of evil at the bottom of his anxiety) to know that the wanderers were settled once more in their cosy English home.

Hudson, ingenuous youth, had written to engage Fitzgerald for the last week of the old and the first week of the New Year. 'To meet the Queen,' he wrote upon a huge card, and down in the corner, with the felicitous ingenuity of impromptu waggery, added the

cabalistic signs 'of m   .'

'He is very young of his age: he must be three or four-and-twenty,' said Fitz to himself, smiling at the conceit as much as at the calmness of the confidential quip.

'Who is young?' asked Graham.

'Hudson. Look here!' and he handed his friend the youth's letter.

'I read, but I do not understand.

'That means Bianca.'

'Bianca? are you serious?'

'Never more so.'

'But Bianca is a child.'

'So everyone tells me.'

‘How well I remember old Casteroni’s picture of her as a baby! It is like yesterday.’

‘All the same. Bianca is a woman, and you deceive yourself. I don’t even know whether one would call her a girl in the sense of being “girlish.”’

‘How so?’

‘Well, on this wise. She has lived exclusively with old people; people old by comparison. My aunt thinks all young creatures ought to be happy. I believe happiness is generally held to be a prerogative of youth, though I expect it’s a fallacy. Hero, from silently dwelling on the disaster of her own early life, and the consequent drawbacks of the position, has come to magnify these last inordinately; and the passion of self-sacrifice being strong upon her, she regards life only in so far as it can be adapted to Bianca’s happiness.’

Graham groaned in the spirit, but in the flesh made no audible reply; observing which, Fitz continued his monologue.

‘They have all ministered to her; my uncle is good-natured and easy-going, proud of Bianca’s beauty and wit. The girl is fearless and frank; speaks half a dozen languages with

facility ; has lived, in a sense, more or less in public, whilst, so far, she has had no intimacies outside her own family. My aunt is the only person who can see any fault in her. But then she is all mother. What Hero is to Bianca she is to Hero ; that, and a great deal more.'

'Naturally. It would seem the women of your family have maternity strongly developed. They are, typically, mothers.'

The words were slightly cynical, if intonation might fairly count.

'I don't know. I suppose the heart must have an outlet in some direction. I don't think Bianca is a predestined mother. I cannot fancy her a martyr to domesticities and dulness. I *can* fancy her a Joan of Arc, a Cleopatra, a Zenobia, a Romola, even a St. Elizabeth, a Corinna, a Hypatia. And the curious part of it is they all think and keep telling themselves and each other that she is a child.'

'Tell me about them,' Graham said, settling himself down in his easy chair, as he took out a cigar, and, speaking with it between his teeth, struck a match briskly. It seemed ages since he had heard anything, and he might as well make himself comfortable whilst Fitz talked.

After long abstinence the hungry heart clamours, though it be but for a crumb of comfort. The strong man is not always strong ; instinct teaches him to hide his moments of weakness ; but he himself knows the weakness is none the less there.

Fitz also was, in a minor degree, passing through a phase of heart-hunger. A few more days and the vacation would empty Oxford, and if the Owens still remained away, he would not know what to do with himself, or how to profit by his freedom. Graham sat and smoked and listened. His mind travelled back to the old Roman days, to afternoons on the Pincio, to mornings in the Campagna, to evenings in the Coliseum. He remembered Hero's voice as, at his request, she sang amidst the shadowy arches of the deserted amphitheatre one of Neale's grand hymns of the Eastern Church, and how it had risen, soaring and thrilling with magic vibrations across the consecrated scene of Christian martyrdom, until the final message of consolation rang forth in silver tones upon the startled midnight air :
'Peace ! it is I !'

These two women, Hero and her mother, both of them in his eyes martyrs, had been

sacred to him in spite of his cynicism ; and, as he sat now in his friend's Oxford rooms, listening to the story of their later lives, an intense longing came upon him to see them both once again.

‘Mrs. Owen seemed to me like a saint,’ he said ; ‘like a Madame de Chantal, or some delicate French lady of other days, devoted to good works, but gracious and graceful still in spite of her piety.’

‘Or, perhaps, because of it,’ Fitz interjected, ‘for my aunt, though deeply religious, is no enthusiast, no bigot. There is nothing ascetic or extreme in her view of life.’

‘No ; she is too calm, of too well-balanced, too large and liberal a mind, too human and devoted in her family affections for that. The wives and mothers who are martyred outnumber the virgin-martyrs, though they be not in the calendar. I wish I had made a drawing of her, with her exquisite profile, her clear delicate colouring, her noble brow, and the soft hair, prematurely grey, that gave such distinction to her head.

‘She is not changed.’

‘And then her intelligence, her ready and easy sympathy, her high-bred air, and mar-

vellously varied conversation ! Never talking too much or too little, but with a graceful turn of language which proved to me conclusively that conversation, as a fine art, is not yet extinct.'

Thus the two men talked together familiarly of past, present, and future, as women often do who love their theme, but men seldom, and then only under exceptional combinations and influences.

'I shall hear in a day or two,' Fitz said, as Graham threw the end of his cigar into the fire, and took down his great coat ; 'if they are in town we will go up together to see them.'

Graham made no direct reply to this proposition, but nodded a silent assent and farewell as he passed out, and found himself with the rain beating in his face once more in the blank, cheerless street. Excitement quickening his pulses, and thrilling his blood, drove him along the flat country road regardless of the cheerless autumn weather, and indifferent to the present solitude and the gathering gloom.

The perils that were closing round the women these two men loved were such as they could neither divine nor remedy. The world is intolerant of the offices of friendship when these

are not authentically solicited by 'the powers that be.' Every man is supposed, by a convenient traditional fiction, to be equal to the headship of his own house. Women err and stray from weakness, not through wickedness. Whilst Mr. Owen was maturing a brilliant scheme for cattle-breeding on the Grampians, poor foolish little Bianca was slowly and surely breaking through the fragile barriers of the family fold, after the immemorial fashion of 'seely sheepe.'

CHAPTER IX.

REVELATIONS.

THE party at Brussels was, like the lot of Mr. Gilbert's policeman, 'not a happy one.'

'I don't know what we could have been thinking of, but I feel that we were wrong to let her see so much of the Kerezoffs,' said Mrs. Owen to her daughter, in an anxious voice.

Oh! my poor child, if Bianca were not all she ought to be to you—if, after all, she were to disappoint you, I could never forgive her, but still less could I forgive myself! I was not blind, and I blame myself—I blame myself!'

'Needlessly, mother, I am sure. You are over anxious, and I, who saw a good deal of them, saw no harm in Madame de Kerezoff. She was frivolous, but she lived happily with her husband; and she was kind to her children and servants. I do so fear wearying Bianca by keeping her too exclusively with us. Jealousy always defeats its own aim.'

‘ A girl of that age “ weary ” of her mother ; and of—you, Hero, of you ?—of such a mother as you have been ? It seems out of place, like an ill-timed humility. That is not the attitude you ought to take up with respect to your child. Why not assert yourself in a reasonable way, and maintain a mother’s rightful authority ? ’

‘ I need not assert my authority if it is not disputed. Bianca never disobeys me.’

‘ Because she always has her own way.’

‘ But if there is no wrong, no harm, in her way ? ’

‘ Still I am not sure she ought always to have it. As a mere matter of discipline.’

‘ Surely, mother, that would be making life too *pénible*. Have you not often said yourself that life brings its own discipline ? There are already difficulties enough without our seeking or creating them. I hope and believe that the more indulgent and the less exacting I am, the more Bianca will love me.’

‘ But she ought to respect you, too ; to respect your will, your opinions, your influence ; to submit her judgment to yours ; to remember we are three and that she is only one.’

‘ You were not this Spartan parent to me,

Mamma mia,’ and Hero laid a cool caressing palm upon her mother’s feverish hand, using the soft southern speech which long sojourn in the land of song had made familiar on her lips.

‘Ah! my child, things were very different with you. Bianca has had indulgences and luxuries that, in my wildest dreams, I never dared to hope for you. You have worked to give her an education, pleasures, toilettes; she has had change, travel, society, amusement. I never worked for you. Your change was from the bedroom to our sitting-room, and *vice versâ*. You have given all your youth, as you will give all your middle life, to your child, whilst I had no youth left to give to mine. You came a little angel of consolation, a priceless gift to me, who could do nothing for you, nothing but love you; who saw you sacrificed, and knew it, and made no sign. Ah! my Hero, you were “the child of your mother only;” but Bianca is Martello’s child, and in Italian blood in the Italian nature, with all its apparent simplicity and frankness, with all its *naïveté* and caressing surface, there always lurks a strain of—of—help me to a word less harsh than intrigue, less cold than concealment.’

‘Mother!’

‘Do not be wilfully blind, Hero.’

‘I am not blind. It is you who see too much. You are over anxious, over sensitive.’

‘You say so, and you think I am unjust. Have you seen Madame de Kerezoff’s last letter?’

‘No; but I could have seen it. Now that you mention it, I don’t know why I did not. Bianca always offers me her letters; and if by chance she omits to do so, I do not like to ask to see them, lest I should appear to be, what I am not, and never could be where she is concerned—suspicious.’

‘That sort of delicacy might be very well between equals and friends, between husband and wife, but it is overstrained between mother and child. It is more than that, for it is a neglect of duty, a *manque de surveillance*, which some day you will regret.’

‘A generous mind is far more likely to feel itself bound not to betray implicit confidence. Many a nature that would evade or resent suspicion would feel it impossible to be false to a trust.’

‘You credit youth with a strength of will

beyond its powers, and you judge other natures by your own. But where outside adverse influences creep in, parents ought not to be surprised to find their trust betrayed. Why do they not lend the aid of their authority, the strength of their influence, claim the full weight of their position as parents, and thus help their children out of the beginning of difficulty?’

Hero, for a moment, did not reply. She was thinking how clearly and strongly her mother spoke, and how different had been her practice from her theory.

‘Young people are so differently brought up nowadays, mother,’ she said at length. ‘They resent all attempt at control. Even when most willing to obey, it must be of their own freewill, of their own initiative, not of compulsion.’

‘May I ask you something, Hero?’

‘Certainly. Anything.’

‘Did you know that Bianca called Madame de Kerezoff “Julie”?’

‘Impossible!’

‘But true! I saw a letter open on the table. It was only the commencement. As Bianca’s grandmother, and, in some sense, her

guardian, I did not scruple to read it. I did not like what I read.'

'Bianca could not say anything wrong.'

'Perhaps not. I do not know. It depends upon what you call wrong. Words—or their meanings—are elastic.'

'O mother, you misjudge her; you do, indeed!'

'And, if Bianca disappoints you, what will your position be?' Mrs. Owen went on, as it seemed to Hero, ruthlessly. 'You have set your life and happiness on the cast of the die, you have sacrificed everything to it, and you must remember that you have nothing to fall back upon if things turn out differently from what you anticipate.'

'Do you know anything, mother, or are you speaking generally?' Hero cried with a sharp tone of suffering in her voice. 'I cannot understand you.'

Respect forbade her saying what she felt, that her mother was needlessly torturing her.

'Perhaps a little of both. If you are wise you will be guided by me; you will trust in my love.'

It was true that Bianca's temper had seemed, day by day, to grow more uncertain.

She was impatient and moody, almost disrespectful to her grandparents, and disregardful of her mother ; the very character of her beauty had undergone a change. Her moments of gaiety were loud and forced ; she was restless and snappish ; now unwilling to move out of the house, at another time complaining of the monotony of their Brussels life. The only moment of the day that seemed to interest her was when, at the sound of the postman's foot upon the stairs, she would rush to fetch her grandfather's newspaper.

‘ Why does Bianca always go to meet the postman ? ’ asked Mrs. Owen one day.

‘ I do not know. Out of idleness, by chance, for no reason,’ Hero replied, inwardly hurt at the implied suspicion. To suspect her child seemed to her an outrage, a degradation of her own maternity. A coolness was growing up between her mother and herself where Bianca was concerned. Now and again fits of gaiety and *épanchement* brought back the frank merry girl of the early summer. The *dénouement* was at hand.

‘ Ah, *Mamma mia* ! do you know what the people say ? I give it you in 99 ? I will not tell you ; it will make the motherkin too vain.

And yet I love them for it.' Then, suddenly, with almost the impassioned tone of a grown woman: 'Ah, mother! why have you not given me, your own and only child, some of your good gifts? Why do you take all the love and keep it all? Why do you gain people's hearts, and not care to have them? Why have you not given me some of these gracious gifts, that I might win hearts? And——' She stopped, confused, her face crimson.

'And throw them away, as you used to throw your broken toys, goosey goosey gander! Why, that is what you accuse me of doing!'

'I should not throw them away,' the girl said almost suddenly, 'I should use them!'

The light of enthusiasm and passion had died out of her face, her voice was harsh, cold, and resentful.

'You have enough love, my child, and to spare; you need not wish for more,' Hero said tenderly, pained she knew not why by the unchildlike outburst. 'The measure of mine is pressed down and running over. Strangers need not intermeddle with our joy.'

'Have I yours mother, truly—*all* yours? *All*? *all*? ' she repeated jealously, insistingly.

'All mine.'

‘So that you could forgive me *anything*?’

‘I cannot fancy that I shall ever have to forgive you anything, Bianca *mia*.’

‘But if you had? If put to the test?’

‘I cannot say what I should do under impossible circumstances,’ her mother answered gravely; ‘and we need not torment ourselves with vain imaginings. It is foolish, even if not wrong.’

‘Then you do not love me as I mean.’ The girl had felt some subtle hidden reproof in the mother’s tone, and in her excitement was ready to resent it.

‘But this is profitless, idle folly,’ Hero said cheerfully; ‘you must not give way to morbid fancies, my child. Brush away these cobwebs, and be my dear Bianca again. You are not amiable of late, not as I like to see you. And, since we are on disagreeable subjects, I must beg you to take heed how you answer your grandparents. They are too good to you for you to treat them roughly.’

Mr. Owen had permitted himself some freedom in speaking of the Kerezoffs and Baron Mellin, and he had expiated his fault at his granddaughter’s hands without knowing the cause of Bianca’s ill-temper.

‘Give her a couple of antibilious pills,’ he said with vulgar common sense, declining to take offence seriously. ‘The girl is out of sorts and wants a dose. Bianca, who chose on the contrary to take everything just then from the tragic side, overlooked her grandpapa’s existence for several days, and was indignant with him for not perceiving her displeasure.

‘What is this?’ said Mrs. Owen one afternoon, holding out her hand carefully as she asked the question.

The three ladies were in her little sitting-room. Mr. Owen was taking his constitutional.

With a cry Bianca darted forwards, springing like a young panther at the fragile hand. She almost tore it open. Glittering between the slender fingers she recognised her silver medal, from which the black chain broken in one of its links still depended. In her excitement she snatched it roughly from her grandmother, Hero looking on in silent amazement.

‘It is mine!’ she cried.

‘Yours? What is it? What does it mean? Where did you get it? Why this excitement? Why have you never shown it

to us? Bianca, how can you be so rough to grandmamma?' were the questions that fell from mother and grandmother in a perfect hailstorm of dismayed interrogatory.

Hero was pale to her very lips.

Bianca answered not a word. Her hand closed over the medallion; she stood before the anxious questioners with compressed lips, sullenly defiant.

'Will you answer nothing, Bianca?' her mother said at last, in indignant despair.

'No.'

'At least, tell me who gave it you? Don't you see, my poor child, that it is *you* who by your misconduct are giving importance to a thing which perhaps is quite indifferent; by your foolish obstinacy you are placing yourself needlessly in the wrong. There can, at worst, be only some error of judgment on your part.'

No answer.

'Bianca,' cried her mother, roused at length to indignation, 'I command you to tell me who gave you that thing? After all, if the only fault you have committed is in having kept the matter a secret, you need not be afraid to own it.'

Then, as suddenly a happy thought occurred

to her, Hero's face lightened and brightened. A girl's modesty is apt to be almost *farouche* when her maidenliness is touched. Smiling and softening, her mother bent over, and in a coaxing voice that almost pleaded for forgiveness with her child, said: 'Did Reggie Hudson give it you, Bianca? If so——' and a world of happy anticipation beamed in the sunshine of Hero's hiatus.

'Reggie Hudson? He? I should think not, indeed!' the girl cried. 'Why should I hide anything about Reggie Hudson?' An expression of almost cruel contempt was in her voice as she repeated scornfully: 'Why should I keep it a secret if he had given it me?'

'Why, indeed?' her mother answered sorrowfully, and again there was a pause. Mrs. Owen had not yet spoken, but her daughter felt that in her own mother's presence she could not thus suffer defeat.

Taking Bianca by the arm she said firmly: 'Bianca, I insist upon knowing once for all who gave you that extraordinary ornament—whatever be its meaning. Tell me who gave it you, and when, and where?'

The worst had come. But it had been

foreseen and provided against. Withdrawing her arm from her mother, and looking at her defiantly as she threw her head back :—

‘Madame de Kerezoff gave it to me,’ Bianca said in a hard voice. She was deadly pale.

A moment’s doubt glanced across Hero’s mind but she dismissed it. Her child would not lie to her.

‘And you write to her as “Julie?”’

‘Who told you so?’

‘I did,’ and her grandmother’s reply met no response.

Again there was silence.

‘All this may be very unimportant, very silly, trifling, and of no consequence,’ Hero said, ‘but that you should have secrets from us, from your mother and grandmother; that you have secrets with strangers, with whom you appear to be on terms of surprising familiarity, can never be unimportant.’

‘They are not strangers to me.’

‘They are to us, and I blame myself for my weakness in allowing you to spend all your time with them as you did at Sprudelheim, but I thought your heart was with us, if you found more amusement with them. It would

seem that the affection which without any cause or reason you have withdrawn from your family, to lavish on these strangers, has not spoken one word of warning to your heart.'

'They are not strangers to me,' the girl again cried, passionately reiterating and re-asserting the fact with hard pertinacity. 'And, if you are a stranger to them, you need not have been so. They showed *you* every kindness; they lavished every attention on *you*. Why, everyone noticed it. Madame de Kerezoff—Julie—told me all Sprudelheim coupled your name with—with—Baron Mellin's, and——'

'Bianca!' cried her grandmother, in a voice that rang through the room; and even the infuriated girl was quieted into momentary respect by the indignation that spoke in the one word of protest. 'You forget yourself. You forget that you are speaking to your mother. You forget yourself as a child, as a modest girl. Go to your room, and when you are able to consider your words, when you are calmer, I, not your mother, will speak to you.'

With pale face, but head erect, Bianca left them.

Hero, as pallid as death, dropped into a

chair. ‘After all, perhaps it is mere childishness,’ she said, bravely, attempting to smile in answer to the look of inquiry in her mother’s face. But the next moment she broke down utterly, her courage deserted her, and she sank sobbing on Mrs. Owen’s shoulder. ‘They have robbed me of my child’s heart,’ she cried; ‘if that is turned away from me, what am I to do?’

‘No, Hero,’ her mother answered, quietly; ‘her heart is not turned against you; you have not devoted your whole life to this child for nothing. Only you must be firm, and not let her see the extent of her own power, or she will abuse it.’

CHAPTER X.

‘THE GOOSE WITH THE GOLDEN EGGS.’

IN a wretched room, situated in one of the most miserable slums of St. Petersburg, a pale woman in a shabby serge gown, trimmed with Astrachan sheepskin, was engaged in rapidly setting up type. A table, three chairs, and the inevitable *Ikön*, or holy picture, were, except a small printing-press, all that the place contained. The grey winter afternoon was sinking into night; a smell of hot tallow rendered the atmosphere of the little room sickening; the closed stove gave out a metallic vapour which made the air stifling beyond endurance. Yet a man, who was seated at a desk writing, uttered a murmur of unmistakable protest as the woman rose, and opening a little pane of glass in the double window, thrust her head into the aperture.

The draught caused the candle placed

before the *Ikon*, near the broken cornice, to flicker so as to endanger the existence of the greasy saint thereon depicted.

‘Pest! it was only wanting that the draught should blow out our last candle,’ he exclaimed, as the long unsnuffed wick at his elbow sent the flame across the paper and accelerated the gutter of the tallow.

‘I cannot bear this atmosphere any longer. It is stifling me,’ the woman answered shortly.

‘I told you that you were too fanciful, and delicate of fibre for the work.’

‘Nothing of the kind; fancy is not in it; but one must breathe.’

‘I don’t see the necessity. As a matter of fact, Katinka Petrowna, we have *not* breathing time, much less leisure to squabble. This sheet must be struck off to-night, and I have not yet finished my address to our brethren at Moscow.’

‘What time do you meet the delegates?’ she asked, turning her head for a moment, but not looking at her companion as she spoke.

‘At nine.’

A pause ensued, during which the woman silently closed the square of glass, and returning to the ‘case,’ continued her work with skilful rapidity. After a pause the man spoke, but

he also refrained from looking up, keeping his eyes fixed on his manuscript.

‘At what hour have you to go to the ball?’

‘I must be ready by half-past seven.’

‘At the Winter Palace?’

‘Yes.’

‘I am ill. My servant will go at the last moment and report to Colonel Krackowsky that I am in bed. If necessary he will make my excuses, semi-officially.’

‘And if they send to see? Surely it would be wiser to go?’

‘They will not. *Du reste*, the figure that will be lying in my bed must not be disturbed. Ivan will take care the patient sleeps his “feverish cold” away.’

‘If we lighted another candle?’

‘No. We cannot afford it; the neighbours might talk.’

‘We are so fortunate in having no *Dvornik*,¹

¹ The functions of the *Dvornik*, or yard-keeper, somewhat resemble those of the French *Concierge*. He acts as a sentinel, standing all day at the gate or door of the house to which he is attached, closely observing all incomers and outgoers. He is popularly supposed to be a paid parasite of the police, and any reluctance on the part of the occupant to permit the *Dvornik* to enter his apartments would rouse his suspicion, and subject the tenant to police surveillance. The *Dvornik* is

that I should have thought we might have allowed ourselves the luxury of forgetting the neighbours,' Katinka said, as, with a sigh and a shrug of impatience, she continued her work.

'How about the correspondence?' asked her companion, after the silence had lasted some time.

'It is safe; Dimitri will bring it.'

A step was heard upon the wooden stair as she spoke. Katinka held up her hand in token of attention, and listened, looking across at the scribe, who also paused for a moment, but without looking up. A hand shook the rough wooden door in the lintel, and a voice outside said, impatiently: 'It is I! Dimitri Serguevitch. Be quick.'

The sallow woman gave a sigh of relief, then, as though awaiting orders from the man at the desk before drawing the bolt, kept her gaze fixed upon him, until he called boldly in a loud voice:—

'Hast thou brought the potatoes, my friend? and if so, what sort are they?'

'English. The German seedlings, as well as the Swiss kidneys, are rotten.'

literally a 'hewer of wood and drawer of water,' and is a familiar feature in Russian domestic life.

‘Tis all right,’ said the scribe, nodding at the woman, and the bolt was suddenly drawn on the inside.

Dimitri Sergueevitch, otherwise Baron Kerezoff, in the dress of the ordinary Russian *moujik*, entered the room. Across his shoulder hung a coarse canvas bag, of which the inequality of outline was sufficiently suggestive of the vegetable produce alluded to.

‘You might have opened quicker,’ he said, throwing the sack upon the ground as he looked at Katinka.

‘I might, but I did not. Goodness knows I am weary enough of all these tiresome precautions,’ answered the woman, dispiritedly, ‘it seems such a farce ; it adds gall and wormwood to the daily cup.’

‘No farce where so much is at stake,’ remarked the scribe, still writing. ‘How could you be sure that some spy in disguise had not appropriated Dimitri’s sack ? And if your husband were to get into trouble through neglect of such simple precautions——’

‘I know my husband’s voice.’

‘It is more than I do, in that Novgorod *patois*. But it is like a woman to weary of small things ; yet by trifles empires have been

overturned. The cackling of geese saved the Capitol.'

'If I don't carry it far enough, *you* carry it too far, with these eternal precautions, *mon ami*. Sergius and Julie are "Dimitri" and "Katinka," even behind bolts and barricades for you. But if you have finished your address to the delegates, you can rest awhile, whilst I read the evening's correspondence.'

The potatoes and turnips were rolled out upon the bare floor, the false bottom to the sack unripped, and a packet of letters extracted.

'The English last,' said Mellin, trimming the tallow candle.

In accordance with his command, French, German, and Swiss letters received the earlier attention.

'The Gallic cock crows loud,' Mellin said contemptuously, 'but—— he lays no eggs.'

Julie read on.

'Our German brethren play the hen to the Gallic cock,' he continued in running commentary; 'if they do not crow, they sit; sit fast and firm, but their eggs are addled with over much incubation. Go on.'

The Swiss correspondence seemed also to afford but little satisfaction.

'The Swiss are the most selfish people under the sun,' grumbled the commentator. 'Remember the Route du Chêne, where the Russian delegates were grossly insulted. They are, like all hybrids, respectably deficient in all the qualities, and all the defects, that mark "race." As calculating as the German, as wordy as the French, they have no comprehension of self-devotion in a great cause. Go on. Hope lies at the bottom of Pandora's box.'

'The goose with the golden eggs,' laughed Julie. 'Let us see how far the generous folly of these (so-called phlegmatic) British will take them; though, to do them justice, it is only the English who are capable of enthusiasm. I cannot imagine a conspiring Scot; the Irish are all froth and sentiment.'

At the words 'folly' and 'froth,' Mellin frowned.

'Your terms are not well chosen,' he said, sternly, 'but no matter, time flies;' and, signing to her to proceed, he fell back in his chair, his gaze fixed upon the ceiling, as though seeking patience amongst the rafters.

'My faith! but it is long!' said Julie, glancing at the closely-written sheets. 'If I

am not to skip, there is no time to lose !' and she began :—

‘Fairholt, near Midhurst, Sussex,
‘December, 18—.

‘Dear Brother,—Although your calendar differs from ours, you cannot be angry if I begin by wishing you a “Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.” You will see by my date that I am no longer in London. Indeed, I only stayed there a few days, for grandmamma was so ill on our arrival from Brussels, and continued to suffer so much that mamma wrote to explain to Mrs. Hudson we could not possibly carry out our promise of spending the last week of the Old, and the first of the New Year with them. By the next train Mrs. Hudson and Reggie came to town, and by dint of telling mamma they would never forgive her if she refused, and declaring I was looking pale and thin, they got their own way, and brought me off to Fairholt with them. I came because you had given me instructions as to what I was to do if occasion offered ; and, if I had refused, I should have had no opportunity of speaking to Reggie in private ; and I was the more willing to come because I was utterly wretched at home. Of course no one knows I write to,

or receive letters from, you, for I could only do so by making pretence to write to Julie. This mamma supposed to be merely the idle gossiping correspondence affected by young ladies, and she never would have suspected the truth but that grandmamma happened to see one of my letters beginning "Dear Julie," instead of "Dear Baroness Kerezoff," and that brought about a fearful scene, which, however, would have died out and been forgotten, but for something that happened almost immediately afterwards, and of which I must now tell you.

'I know that you will blame me, say I am undeserving of your trust and confidence, perhaps think me a careless, idle, ungrateful girl. I blame myself so much that you cannot be more severe to me than I am to myself; but that will not remedy the disaster. Here it is. One day, before I had missed it or knew of my loss, grandmamma picked up my medallion. The little iron chain had snapped and fallen through a loose jacket I was wearing. Owing to the softness of the carpet I did not hear it fall. I thought I should have fainted when grandmamma opened her hand, and asked whose it was? I snatched it from her. She and mamma were furious. They talked of "deceit,"

and "betrayal of trust," yet they only thought it a grotesque ornament, given me by Julie. I let them think so. It was arranged Julie should *send*, although you *gave* it to me. And now, the moment I thought impossible, but which you, in your wisdom and prevision had foreseen, had arrived! It was not the thing itself, they said, but the keeping it a secret, that hurt them.

'Faithful to my promise, I gave no explanation; for, seeing them so put out by a trifle I could not help being glad that I was bound in honour not to tell them the truth. How I repented that I had not passed a ribbon through the ring, for then the vexatious thing need not have happened. The feeling that I was suffering silently for a great cause could not buoy me up, for the suffering grew out of my own carelessness, and was totally unconnected with the thing itself; and though all the petty considerations of personal affection and jealousies, as you have so often told me, shrink into utter insignificance when compared with that which must make or mar the happiness of millions of fellow-creatures, yet I am uneasy at having wounded my mother without benefiting a single human being. The only thing that I

feel satisfied with myself about is that I have offered no explanations. I have strictly obeyed your injunctions on other matters, as you will presently see.

‘Opportunity soon offered (as Reggie Hudson and I walk and ride together every day, sometimes alone, sometimes with neighbours) for me to tell him the contents of your last. Of course I did not say that I had heard from you, since you forbade it; but I spoke as though the information, the argument, the reasoning were my own (you must not think me very conceited). He seemed a good deal cooled down since Sprudelheim, and said he did not like having unnecessary secrets from his mother, who is very good to him. He also told me, what I did not know before, that he only comes fully of age at five-and-twenty, and that although he has a very liberal allowance, he can’t dispose of large sums of money. It seems that he has promised never to go to strangers or money-lenders, and that he had to borrow largely of Mrs. Hudson to make up the sum he lost to the Kerezoffs at *écarté*. Mrs. Hudson said very harsh things about people winning, privately, large sums of money from young men who are minors. This obliged Reggie to

tell her that all they so won they devoted to good works, printing, and so on, for the enlightenment of their poorer fellow-countrymen ; but she persisted that no good could come of ill-gains, and Reggie said she was too old to see the "Cause" in its true light, or to understand that in elevating humanity one forwards the ultimate happiness and liberty of the whole world. Reggie and I almost came to words, but as you forbade me to quarrel with him I managed to keep my temper. He proposed our laying the whole thing before Mr. Fitzgerald, who, he says, is an advanced Liberal, and quite without bias ; but I protested against this, and even made him promise me, upon his word of honour, not to consult my cousin, for I think he was already suspicious before we left Sprudelheim. You had better not write to me here. If I had left, Mrs. Hudson, suspecting nothing, might forward the letter through mamma. Englishmen have very odd ideas ; they are strait-laced in some things to an incredible degree [although the freedom allowed to young English ladies always astonishes foreigners], and even Reggie, though he seems to be ready to do almost anything in order to stand well with me, would certainly

go against me if he thought I was deceiving my mother. My cousin Fitz worships grandmamma and mamma equally, and I fancy has no great liking for me, so that I am rather uncomfortable all round ; but I am afraid you will be disgusted with me for talking so much about myself. As Reggie could only spare five-and-twenty pounds, which he begs me to say he hopes will go to the “Siberian exile fund,” I add the Christmas-boxes grandpapa and grandmamma sent me. Mamma did not give me money, but a locket : and Fitz sent me, through her, the bracelet I forward by post, which you must give to the fund for the widows and orphans of those who have died for their opinions. If there is anything I can do, let me know ; but if you are too busy to write, let me have only one line, saying, “*I forgive you.*” My love to Julie. This goes, as usual, under cover to her. Ever faithfully,

BIANCA.’

The foolish, school-girlish, garrulous letter seemed strangely out of place amongst such grim surroundings, but the crisp Bank of England notes crackled agreeably between Julie’s slim fingers as she smoothed them out and held

them to the candle with a half contemptuous smile.

‘Has she sent the bracelet?’ asked Mellin, disdaining sentiment, and not ashamed to seem grasping since his greed was for the ‘Cause.’

‘Doubtless. But you know parcels are always delayed in the post. What a feeble little goose it is! But beggars can’t be choosers, and we cannot afford to despise the golden eggs.’

‘The propaganda is at a standstill for want of funds,’ said Mellin, gravely.¹

‘We must see what can be done *am Ort und Stelle*. To-night I shall see Prince Karishkin!’ and Katinka made a sweeping court curtsy in grotesque contrast with her frayed and faded gown.

‘If it be true that “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” the charming Julie de Kerezoff will only have to ask and to have,’

¹ It is erroneously, but very generally, believed, that the Nihilists have enormous means at their disposal. So opposed is this to the true state of the case that, as a modern Nihilist author observes, ‘*they are always hunting about for a few roubles. The expenses of the struggle are immense, and they are compelled to do everything in the most economical manner, often at the risk of their lives.*’

Mellin replied, answering her curtsey by an expressive gesture.

Katinka curtsied again in acknowledgment, but sighed the next moment, as she said to her husband, who was listening moodily to the dialogue : ‘ I have barely time to dress for the Court ball.’

‘ And *à propos*,’ Mellin exclaimed, ‘ your diamonds?’

‘ I have the whole *parure*.’

‘ I am not sure that I shall allow you to go to-night,’ said her husband suddenly, awaking out of his sullen moodiness, and speaking with some violence. ‘ I am sick and surfeited with mortifications and annoyances. There is a term to human endurance. What, if your hundred odd bosom-enemies should discover, Julie, that you are wearing paste?’

‘ No fear, *mon ami*. If paste were so easily recognised as that, the Palais Royal jewellers would starve.’

‘ And you do not regret your jewels?’ asked Mellin, with an inflection of respectful sympathy in his voice, as, passing by the husband’s remarks in silence, he looked curiously at the wife.

‘ Not a bit.’

‘It is for the Good Cause.’

‘It is to avenge a sister’s wrongs. Revenge is sweet, especially, someone has said, to women,’ Julie answered.

‘Call it by what name you like, *cela revient à la même chose*. I speak of the thing, you of the person ; but we are at one, for all that.’

‘Remember, Julie,’ Kerezoff interrupted, ‘you have to make a wide *détour*. You have forgotten that your *toilette de ville* is where you left it, and that you said half an hour since you must be going.’

‘Yes! and my servants and sledge still waiting before the princess’s portico, whilst I am supposed to be drinking endless tea. Till this day fortnight then,’—and, nodding to Mellin as she blew out the candle, Julie and the two men passed out of the wretched room on to the squalid landing of the miserable house, locking the door of the garret carefully behind them.

‘See,’ said a neighbouring cobbler to his wife, ‘Dimitri Serguevitch and his sister have put out their light. I wager they will be up and off betimes, for they have been hard at work to get their gift-books and *Ikons* ready against Christmas.’

‘I don’t envy these poor book, medal, and

Ikon hawkers at this time of year,’ said his comely kind-hearted spouse; ‘but what wilt thou? One must eat to live, and they are fortunate in having no little mouths to clamour to them for food.’

‘That’s as it may be,’ said the friendly cobbler, patting his little cobblerkin on the curly pate, whilst the mother bent and kissed the child’s blonde head.

Mellin had been endeavouring ever since the year 1860 to establish a secret printing-press in St. Petersburg. He and his associates fully recognised the fact that Herzen’s free press in London, and that in Switzerland, no longer sufficed for the needs of the Propaganda, since local questions were daily becoming more urgent.

Other ‘circles’ had made the same attempt; but, after printing a proclamation or two, had invariably been discovered. One society, whose type and machines had lain hidden away in holes and corners for more than five years, had been betrayed by the treachery of a *Dvornik*, and their property confiscated, whilst the conspirators were subjected to perpetual police *surveillance*. Domiciliary visits were the order of the day; and, after so many failures,

the project was finally abandoned as impossible of realisation.

Only Mellin, with that tenacity of purpose which was one of his distinguishing characteristics, still clung resolutely to his original design.

Julie Kerezoff, emulating the example of many young ladies of aristocratic birth—who, in order to spread the principles of the Propaganda, laboured as many as fifteen hours a day in factories, workshops, and fields—had spent the whole of a summer holiday in Switzerland acquiring the compositor's art; and, knowing her energy and trustworthiness, Mellin had confided to her the secret of his address. Not even his contributors knew where the press was established, and all communications reached him through a third person, who neither knew their import nor suspected Mellin's connection with this branch of Propagandist activity.

The mechanism was, necessarily, of the simplest, and in case of need everything could be hidden in a quarter of an hour in a large clothes-press, constructed in the wainscotting of the room. A small cylinder, some brushes and sponges in a pan; a large, heavy cylinder

covered with cloth, which served as the press, and a couple of jars of ink, together with the necessary type and cases, formed the whole apparatus.

As the Emperor Alexander, surrounded by a brilliant staff of generals, chamberlains and court officials, made the tour of the ball-room at the Winter Palace a few hours later, finding a gracious word for this officer, a flattering sentence for that lady, a friendly smile for the other devoted adherent, he stopped a minute before Baron Kerezoff.

‘You have returned then ; your work completed ?’

‘Sire, as your Majesty says.’

‘Ah ! we must reward your labours. Mere money payment does not at all express what a sovereign feels for those who faithfully serve him.’

Baron Kerezoff inclined his head still lower.

And, arrived at the spot where, in an exquisite toilette, the Baroness Kerezoff was attracting glances respectively of admiration and jealousy, the Czar again paused.

Evidently the Kerezoff couple were to enjoy

a social success if Imperial favour had any meaning.

‘I need not ask after your health, madame. The air of Asia Minor evidently agreed with you.’ The aides-de-camp fell discreetly back, and on Julie’s rising gracefully from the depths of the profound curtsey into which on the approach of the Czar she had sunk, His Imperial Majesty added in a lower tone :—

‘And your *parure*, madame? Did that, too, come from Asia Minor?’

A sudden colour suffused Julie’s face, even through her rouge. Could some spy have betrayed the secret of her diamonds, and the end to which their proceeds had been devoted, or was this a delicate hint that contractors and engineers had bribed and plundered too greedily? Could the *air of Asia Minor* be an euphemism for the stifling atmosphere of Siberian mines, or were jewels too costly for the wife of Kerezoff? But without betraying herself or her perplexity, Julie looked the Czar gravely in the face as she said composedly :—

‘A railway, sire, boldly planned and faithfully executed, carried from the sea of Azoff safely beyond the Persian frontier, naturally means diamonds for the engineer’s wife, be he

civil or military ; and these mean, in a minor degree, respect for our nationality, and recognition of your Imperial Majesty’s power.’

‘Quite so ; only, Madame la Baronne, you must allow me to take the liberty of recognising your and your husband’s loyalty, self-devotion and voluntary exile by increasing the contents of your jewel-case.’

Again a sweeping reverence, and the Emperor had passed on his glittering way.

‘Could he have meant anything?’ Julie Kerezoff murmured anxiously in the ear of her partner, Prince Karishkin, as later that evening they swam round the room to one of Strauss’s waltzes.

‘*Chi lo sa?* Only, the promised bracelets must never go the same road as their predecessors. By the way, your last letter was eloquent.’

‘It was written on the anniversary of my sister’s——’

‘Chut ! Yes ! Algeria produces wonderful vegetables. I am told that the asparagus is gigantic.’

It required nothing more. Julie understood that they were to separate. She made a profound curtsy. The Prince put out his hand

to lead her ceremoniously to a seat. When he left her, he left ten thousand roubles in her glove.

‘It is for the Good Cause!’ said Julie.

CHAPTER XI.

‘REGARD OF HONOUR AND MILD MODESTY.’

GRAHAM, *the painter par excellence* of the Thames, the Spenser of the brush,—as well known in Oxford as in London, and *vice versâ*, had not always been the prosperous individual so popular in University quadrangles at the time our story commences.

On the contrary, his had been, as our friends across the Channel say, ‘a stormy youth.’ He had had his chances, and in the madness of his folly he flung them recklessly away. He had not, perhaps, been exceptionally wild, but it is to be hoped he had been exceptionally obstinate. Anything like control he especially resisted. Parents he had not, and the tyranny of guardians he resented on purely sentimental grounds. He could understand that for a mother’s sake, for a sister’s happiness, for a father’s honour, sacrifices might be not only

possible but pleasant. But the dim and distant fetish of his own problematical future self he refused to set up, and absolutely and finally declined to fall down and worship. 'I can but enjoy myself as long as I am able,' he would say in reply to his guardians' remonstrances. 'Who knows? Perhaps I may be killed in a railway accident before I am five-and-twenty! A young fellow I know got a tap on the skull last Christmas that will certainly save him from the ignominy of being plucked in his "smalls." Or by five-and-twenty I may have used up all my capacity for enjoyment, or for utilising the advantages you are laboriously laying in store for my future delectation.' The guardians shook their wiser heads in dumb dismay, and were not surprised when an intimation reached them that Mr. Eustace Graham's name had been taken off the books of his college, and that that young gentleman had disappeared into space.

Space is convenient. It saves postage-stamps, pens, ink, and paper, and the wasted effort of worthy persons in a remonstrative direction. For several years Mr. Eustace Graham had only a local habitation for his bankers. And this was only in so far indicated

by their client directing that his letters and dividends should be sent to the *poste restante* of a given Continental city.

One effort, the last and the least productive of good, it may be the most conducive to evil results, the guardians, being men of honour, made. Had they but known it they might have saved him by silence. But on occasions of the kind silence seems to give consent, and to the conscientious looker-on assumes the aspect of cowardice. Thus, in their honest endeavour to save him from final destruction, they sent him posting on the road to ruin.

Vast sums of money, deep groans, bewailings, and lifting up of hands and eyes followed, and at length the day came when guardianship, even in its nominal form, was over, and the last clue to young Graham's whereabouts was lost.

In old Casteroni's Roman studio his was a familiar figure. Everyone loved this simple frugal Englishman. If they smiled at his manifold enthusiasms, his devotion to art, his reverence for Italy, they loved him for his impulsive frankness and his direct address, so unlike (so they told themselves and each other) the customary ceremonious coldness of his com-

patriots. He threw himself into the heart of Rome as unhesitatingly—to use his own jesting simile—as Marcus Curtius, and delighted in the society of the *ateliers*, where to a sympathetic audience he would rave by the hour, in his queer Italo-Britannic lingo, on the glories of the Eternal City. Not content with ‘doing’ the correct round of sight-seeing, according to Murray or Baedeker, he would seek out obscure traditions of obscurer corners, teaching even the Romans themselves things new to them, following up fresh tracks and pursuing old traces in all sorts of forgotten historic nooks, with an energy and an enthusiasm that alike enchanted and amazed his amiable but apathetically contented hearers.

The world, he declared, owed Italy a debt the world could never pay; and he would pour out a flood of facts and fancies of Pagan and of Christian Rome, of the Renaissance, of the Decadence, so full of names and dates, of association and quotation that from Cicero to Shelley, from Messalina (and the little garden of the house, now a *pension*, where the Roman empress tried on one occasion to commit suicide) to Mrs. Browning, from Cæsar to Keats, from the Gracchi to Garibaldi, from St. Peter and St.

John, the tenth Leo and the seventh Gregory ; and so on, through the splendid roll-call of the painters and poets, whose names re-echo in the hearts of all lovers of art and song, he would carry his hearers from Rome to Padua, from Ravenna to Florence, from Venice to Naples, from Pisa to Bologna, from Mantua back again to Rome. to break out in a fresh place with fresh enthusiasm. No wonder the simple, loving Italian nature felt at once flattered and entertained, soothed and glorified, by the enthusiasm and eloquence of this fiery young Briton’s whirl and rush of admiration. But if he talked, being ravenous for information, eager to learn, anxious to know, he listened as well as talked. With an almost childlike absorption in the speaker’s narrative he would hang on old Casteroni’s words, patiently enduring the slow and quaint communications of a life-long familiar devotion to the history of Rome’s great, mysterious, all-embracing, all-including heart. To recall the eager and ardent Graham of this period, of his awakening to a new life, would be to recall a queer unassorted jumble of strange useless lore, the ‘lumber’ of history ; of quotations from obscure poets, of local legends, side by side with the grand names

that must for ever make Rome great and glorious '*in secula seculorum*,' as he would finish up his fit of enthusiasm, reverently doffing his bonnet in memory of those departed glories which can never die.

But no one who saw the young fellow thus would have recognised him as he went away through the solitude of the splendid Roman night, when the moonbeams lay like liquid silver, flooding the pavement, and the skies, powdered with stars, were suffused with a pale radiance, and luscious perfumes ascended like the fragrant incense of Nature to heaven, and the musical Silences, broken by the fall of plashing waters in marble fountains, fell not less upon the spirit than on the ear; and the vastness of the ruin wrought by Fate and the littleness of man, and the nothingness of our petty human passions, and the immensity of God and Nature, smote his soul into a silent adoration, and a dumb humility foreign to the garrulous spirit of the day.

No one saw him or would have recognised him as he sat in his little room, his face full of blank bitterness; and none of his friends would have understood the dismay and disgust of his mind, as the babblings of his meridian hours

came back to him ; and he not unseldom cursed himself for the crudest, vainest, shallowest of impertinent chatterers, ignoramuses, and fools. It was at this time, at once so rich and so poor, so full and so empty, that Graham first saw Hero and loved her.

It was fate, he said.

Casteroni, with his slow didactic utterances, his innocent cunning and extraordinary simplicity of vanity, was nevertheless a faithful soul. By degrees he had told the young man all Hero's story, and Graham, affecting a levity for which he hated himself at the time, said, lightly laughing : ' And so your wonderful Hero turns out to be a very commonplace heroine, after all ! '

' Say an angel rather, young man,' answered the maestro in a tone of grave rebuke ; and Graham mentally thanked him for his severity.

It was the old story. Neither thought the other cared, until an accident revealed that both cared too much.

The knowledge was at once bliss and anguish to Graham. To Hero—women are different from men in these things—it was, at first, only unalloyed bliss. The certainty of

love seems, at first sight, so all-sufficing. Doubt, torment, jealousy, fear, misgivings all at an end. To love and be loved, what woman could want more, and what true woman does not desire as much? Why look back? Why look forward? The past had been a blank, and who could foretell the future? But the present, the bright, happy, secure, peaceful present,—that was theirs. They needed no speech of one another, no caresses; they had but to look in one another's eyes, and read the truth there; to clasp one another's hands in momentary greeting and farewell, to know that faith and loyalty met palm to palm, beat pulse to pulse. The vulgar considerations of the commonplace of life, by which the body-politic is governed and preserved from all excesses (excess of sentiment amongst others), seemed outside the conditions of their being. To the woman, at any rate for a time, the contemplation, the unquestioned absorption and rapture of contentment would have seemed enough. Stabilised and strengthened by this immense fact, upheld, sustained, and comforted by the support of a wholly loving, wholly faithful human soul, to Hero it seemed after the black and bitter past that a woman for love's sake could be and do,

suffer and endure, all things without complaint. Life itself changed at once from a sacrifice to an offering. Duty became worship. It was as though some buoyant principle had entered into her. The ground grew elastic beneath her tread. She herself seemed inspired, etherealised, as one who, no longer condemned to tread the dull earth in dreary routine, is lifted by wingèd feet into another region, untrodden save of the elect. Her beauty lost its only drawback, a certain pallid shadow as of melancholy or resignation, and became suddenly resplendent, roseate, lit up with a strange inner light, shining steadily in lambent fearlessness and frankness out of her large trustful eyes. She was, as it were, irradiated with unwavering contentment. The kiss of love had awakened the spell-bound woman in her, and for the first time she realised the possibilities of Life and Love. Love is wonder. Love is praise. And with the revelation, to some natures, there comes a sense of awe, a need almost of solitude, where the votary may draw apart from the world, and commune unquestioned with the sacred secrets of his own spirit and his own heart, and be still.

The 'recollection' of piety has its parallel

in the secret contemplation of an emotion not less sacred, and equally of Divine inception. But this attitude is not susceptible of indefinite prolongation. Graham spoke; the man, life, reality, stirred within him, and with speech the spell was spoken, the charm at an end. Explanation and its attendant miseries, unavoidable on either side, showed them both with convincing finality that the position was not tenable. In her anguish Hero turned to her mother; and Léonie silently laid her child in the young mother's arms. In his misery Graham found all society unbearable, and he disappeared from Rome, leaving no address behind.

When, after three months' wandering on foot, he returned, it was to find Mrs. Owen and her daughter on the eve of starting for England. He was shocked to see the change three months' uncertainty and grief had wrought in Hero; and his own selfishness was revealed by the havoc sorrow had made in the sad-eyed woman he met. She did not pretend to have been otherwise than wretched; not because of their separation, but because of his misery, rebellion, possible resentment, and positive silence. Uncertainty had told heavily, and there was little need of words.

‘A line to my mother would have set my mind at rest,’ she said.

‘I thought of that. But it seemed such a sham; such a shabby, paltry, subterfuge. It was you I wanted, and to you I ought to have written.’

‘But if it had set my mind at rest?’

He saw it now, too late. He had almost tried to persuade himself, when she sent him away, that she did not care for his anger and disappointment. He had called up in aid of his mortification all the vulgar platitudes of cheap commonplace as to the shallowness, frivolity, poorness, and feebleness of women; but they had not consoled him. And now, without a word of complaint on her part the story of her love and of her sorrow was written, all too plainly to be gainsaid, in her face.

‘It shall not happen again,’ he said, ‘come what come may.’ Then, catching her hands in his: ‘But don’t expect more from me than I promise. I will not keep up a *dilettante* correspondence with you, full of “elegant extracts,” and pretend it is “friendship.” I have no understanding for the intellectual coquetries of what people are pleased to call “literary friendships.” I love you, Hero, and I let you go

because my love shall never harm or injure you—that I swear. But I love you as a man loves the one woman in all the world to him. I shall count my life as nought, as blank and void, as dark and empty, and of no effect, so long as it is passed away from you, and I will never give up the hope that we may yet be one. I will work and hope. When I can see you without injuring you, I will see you. But I could not, now I know you love me, spend hour after hour and day after day in your society, content with that. No man who really loved a woman could. And I, at least, will not try it. Fate takes you from me, but cannot separate us. I ask, I can ask, no promise of you—I dare not insult you with words of hope; you know my love, but you will not listen to it. We can both work and wait. Silence means effort and a goal—it may be distant—to be attained. For your sake I love your mother and reverence her for the saint she is. And after you and your mother I love Rome. I will not set idle tongues gossiping about you here. I am going to England. I shall not see you often if I remain there, but I shall see you sometimes—I shall write to you sometimes—and I shall love you always. I know

you too well to ask you not to offend me by any missish offers of sisterly regard—not to outrage my love by any shallow compromise unworthy of us both, impossible for either.'

They kissed and parted, and both were loyal to the programme laid down. Hero acknowledged the dual impossibility of loving or forgetting; her mother, who knew all the disaster included in this fresh mistake, which seemed to fill her daughter's cup of anguish to the brim, could only deplore the evil chance and admire Hero's courage, looking on with silent pity. To her Graham told the truth as he dared not tell it to Hero.

How in his hot-headed, rash, insubordinate youth he had given himself and his name to a woman who had had the cunning to appeal to the generous weakness of his character. He believed her tale, and found, too late, that he had committed an act of irreparable folly. Instead of an innocent victim heartlessly jilted by a faithless lover, he had married a woman whose calculations had for once been at fault—a person of damaged reputation. Recrimination, scenes of violence, debt, disgrace, and all the disgust of disillusionment and a disorganised domesticity, determined him upon leaving her.

When, after months of humiliation, his lawyer intimated that all debts were paid, the amount of capital left proved hardly sufficient to afford a life of decent comfort for both. Two-thirds of the sum were, under certain conditions, settled on the woman ; and the man, once more taking his life in his hands, went forth to seek his fortune ostensibly unfettered, and yet secretly manacled for life.

‘ If I could have dreamed of winning Hero’s heart,’ he said to her mother, ‘ believe me I would never have taken one voluntary step in that direction. Honour would have forbidden it, common justice forbade it. I know her pure, proud, stainless soul too well not to shudder at the feelings with which she would hear my story. Hers I know ; that is, as the world knows it, but one needs only to look in her face to speak her blameless.’

‘ Poor Hero ! Poor child !’ said her mother, who saw only misfortune in all this, yet had not one harsh word for the man, so winning in his frank regret and love, beside her.

‘ The more I think of it, the more wonderful it seems, and the more unworthy I feel. That I should love her was inevitable, but that she should love me ! But talking will do no

good. I promise you not to trouble her peace, not to worry her with complaints. If you are merciful—I only ask it in the name of mercy, not in that of justice—as you are merciful you will write to me now and then, and tell me how she is, and what she is doing. Tell me what dress she wears; how her hair is arranged; whether she is singing much; whether she is well and cheerful. Alas! that I cannot make her happy.'

And so it had been. Mrs. Owen had a gift amounting to clairvoyance in matters of character.

'No man with a voice like that could be a villain,' she said; 'it rings true. He is real down to the last fault, folly, or failing in his character.'

Then came the day when Martello's death set Hero free. Hero herself remained silent.

To her mother Graham wrote in reply: 'Your news makes the position of things almost worse. She is free, and I am bond! And how bond? If I shrank, years ago, from the disgrace of dragging my name through the dreary details of the Divorce Court, judge with what horror I should contemplate such degradation in her pure eyes at the present time! I confess

that I am behind my age. I do not understand that spirit which, in the result achieved, overlooks all other considerations. I am thin-skinned, and the very lapse of time would tell against me. I should be asked why I had remained passive all these years, to open up the case thus late in the day? Motives would be sought and imputed; her spotless name perhaps dragged in. And then—supposing it possible I could take such a step—with what countenance could I offer her a name, wrested from one unworthy to bear it, and already befouled and disgraced and dragged through the mire? Do not hate me, if you can help it; and yet, if you knew all, you would pity me.'

It was thus no surprise to Graham when the morning's post brought a letter to his Oxford lodgings from Hero, to the effect that her mother, who was feeling a little better since her late attack, had expressed a wish to see him the first time he was in town.

Within half an hour he was *en route* for London.

CHAPTER XII.

‘ THREE GENERATIONS.’

MRS. FITZGERALD had taunted her son with his ‘ Owen ’ *cultus*, flinging in his face her opinion that it was Hero (‘ old enough,’ as with feminine exaggeration, finely tempered with spite, she observed, ‘ to be his mother ’) he loved.

In truth she did not believe him to be ‘ in love ’ with either of the ladies, though it pleased her to say so, ‘ what time indignation ’ at his defection yet vexed her, ‘ as a thing that is raw.’ Maternal jealousy is not the least afflictive variety of the pallid passion, and if Mrs. Fitzgerald’s form of the disease was rather of the active than the passive variety, her son did not suffer the less from the violent periodical attacks to which she was subject, and he subjected.

Unconsciously, mother and son were tending in the same direction, each, in fact, being

unaware of this modification of opinion, and, as yet, but vaguely affected by the incipient change. Combined with jealousy of Mrs. Owen and Hero, Mrs. Fitzgerald suffered from acute curiosity on their account. Too proud to ask her son any direct questions, which might be construed either as prying inquisitiveness or be taken to betray a kindly interest, she contented herself as a rule with flinging down assertions to their discredit, so unlike the truth that Fitz let the gauntlet of abuse lie where it fell, thinking it not worth while to contradict such extravagant absurdities as his mother wilfully set forth.

But this masterly inactivity left the poor lady very much in the dark, and gave her a sense of baffled ignorance very unpleasant to a person on the look out for any small item of information germane to the subject in which a lively interest is felt.

Casting about in her mind for means of studying from the life these 'models of virtue,' as she contemptuously characterised them to her son, she decided that Bianca must be the connecting link, the means of *rapprochement* between the two families. She could condescend to the child, where her pride would not

permit her to make advances to the mother and grandmother; and, whilst she was yet deliberating on a means, the manner of which should not be too palpably reconciliative, her ends were served, by fate, after an altogether unforeseen fashion. Fitz, after spending the 'festive season' *tête-à-tête* with his exacting parent, betook himself, according to long promise, to the Hudsons for the first fortnight of the New Year.

Bianca, in a few commonplace phrases, had thanked him by letter for the bracelet he had sent her. 'Just such an one as she had seen and coveted in the arcades at Sprudelheim, and with all good wishes for the coming year, she was his affectionate cousin.'

Between the lines and in the handwriting of the regulation epistle, Fitz seemed to see more than the mere expressionless acknowledgments of a well brought up young lady. The writing was original, firm, and almost masculine in its freedom from twirls, flourishes, and scoring. The phraseology, if simple, was compact, and the note itself was as carefully dated and signed and the address as correctly given, as if Fitzgerald had never heard of Hudson, or Fairholt, or his correspondent before.

Since Bianca was a little toddling thing Fitz had loved and believed in her, at the same time telling himself that she was unlike what he should have chosen, had choice been possible, for a sister or *fiancée*. Watching her narrowly, he saw the germs of remarkable qualities in her frank, girlish outspokenness. He could fancy her, in one mood, going to the stake, sublime in all the strength of virgin martyrdom; in another, defying opinion, convenience, prejudice, and proclaiming a propaganda of personal freedom, subversive of all that social ethics have consecrated by custom. 'The daily round, the common task,' he thought, would never be enough for her. And, whereas her mother and grandmother shrank from all publicity, and thought notoriety the grave of the 'eternal womanly,' this girl, with warm Italian blood coursing through her veins, would, like another Corinna, have gloried in coronation at the Capitol. From her earliest childhood she had, in a sense, shown a spirit of independence that required very tender handling. She would give her clothes, new as well as old, to little beggar-girls in the street, and suffer punishment—a philosophic impenitent; saying beneath her breath: 'I know I was right. The poor girl

was nearly naked. The beggar child was in rags.'

'But your mother could have given you older clothes for her; clothes more fitted to her needs.'

'Then *I* should not have given them. I loved my Sunday frock; ' seeing the merit of the gift in the sacrifice, not in the value of the gift itself, with an insight or an intuition far beyond her years. Hero's instinct taught her truly that such a nature should be hampered with as few commands and as few prohibitions as possible; that the child should feel its power to wound and grieve as a mean and base privilege, the exercise of which meant shame to all generous and loving natures. Thus she lived with her mother and grandparents on a curious basis of equality, taking her place at the family table, sitting in a corner of the family room, wrapped round and enveloped with feminine love and care.

'I have to love her for two,' Hero would say to her own mother. 'She must never feel the want of a father's love.'

'And mine? Ours? Does that count for nothing, Hero?' asked her mother jealously.

'For everything, mother. But a heavy

weight of responsibility lies on my shoulders. I took her from her father, and she must never be able to say I robbed her of her birthright of love.'

'You are super-sensitive, you caricature conscience. Did he love her? Would you have had your child ruined by the sight of your own degradation? How could she have respected you, hearing language of the sort we both remember, addressed to you? What would she have grown up?' Mrs. Owen would ask, with the indignation of common sense as opposed to sentiment.

'Yes, mother. You are right, and were it all to do again, I should do as I have done. For myself, I could have borne it, as I had borne it. Use is second nature. But I had no right to sacrifice the child. I was forced to rescue it.'

'That is sensible. If Bianca were to disappoint you, I could never forgive her.'

'You love Bianca, mother, and yet you speak as though it were possible not to do so.'

'I am not blind. Martello's blood flows in her veins. We cannot lose sight of that; and we must guard against the consequences.'

'And in mine there is also a mixture. Yet you do not blame me for being my father's child. You are less than just to Bianca.'

‘Ah! in yours, my sweet Hero, I think it is only a second better self that lives.’

And the pale, fragile lady kissed the eager face of her daughter and drew it close to her own, so like and yet so unlike.

If there was one point on which Hero was more keenly sensitive than on another, it was with regard to those years of enforced publicity, when, in order that her child might be tenderly cared for, warmly housed, softly bedded, anxiously guarded, and carefully taught, the husbandless wife had to conquer her shrinking pride and timidity, and take that final, fatal step by which a woman makes herself public property, defenceless against public comment, and the target of public criticism. Those few years of unceasing work, under a feigned name, had given her the modest competence she now enjoyed, and it was her warmest hope that Bianca might never know that her mother had emerged from the sacred shelter of hearth and home, a voluntary, if fainthearted victim.

To her parents Hero had spoken once for all, urgently, imperatively, on this point, and they were not likely to betray her. Fitz knew that it was not to be referred to in Bianca’s presence, and Graham sympathised

with her so entirely, that to him she had even appeared to make light of her own susceptibilities, fearing to give weight to his jealous sensibility on all details touching her honour and fair fame, and the guarded and shielded life he thought right for women.

She still gave lessons at her own house, but absolutely refused to go to the homes of her pupils; and thus, nearly every day of the week, fair young girls attended by governesses, or accompanied by their mothers, would emerge from luxuriously appointed carriages, and trip eagerly up the stairs to Hero's pleasant drawing-room.

She called herself professionally Madame Martello, and several songs of her composition, which had become popular in London drawing-rooms, bore the name Hero Martello on the title-page.

Bianca had continually passing before her eyes the fairest models of well-bred grace and refinement in these budding blossoms of English wealth and aristocracy, just on the verge of early womanhood, bearing the stamp of delicate nurture in their unaffected grace and simple manners. Not a few of these young girls worshipped Hero with that kind of heroine-worship

which is common to the enthusiasm of feminine youth ; and the mothers were happy to find in Madame Martello, instead of the clever, florid foreigner many expected, a sweet and gracious Englishwoman, whose manners and bearing had that *cachet* of distinction which popular voice declares cannot be produced under three generations of culture.

The beautiful elderly French lady—seated by the fire, knitting or reading, her soft white hair covered by the rare lace that told its own history, her pale, finely cut face, and thin delicate hands proclaiming her gentle birth—was an object of interest in the family picture ; and, as time went on, and Bianca, from an *espiègle*, lively child, shot up into a slender gazelle-like girl, full of fearless animation, the group gained in character, charm, and interest.

Bianca pursued her studies, drew, wrote themes, and translated modern languages in the room where the singing-lessons were given ; and many were the invitations proffered and declined, many the efforts at nearer acquaintance pleasantly urged and as steadily resisted by Hero. Of late Bianca had appeared to resent her mother's persistent refusal of the

attentions offered ; and the day came when, with her accustomed outspokenness, she expressed herself on the subject :—

‘Why did you refuse Lady Fortescue’s invitation, mother?’

‘I did not wish to accept it,’ Hero answered simply.

But this was not the answer Bianca wanted.

‘But I wish you had accepted it,’ she said ; and then, her mother not noticing her emphasis, she added, interrogatively : ‘Why not ? Is there any reason ?’

‘Do you question your mother’s judgment?’ Mrs. Owen asked, severely. It had not escaped her that Bianca was no longer inclined to take her mother’s decisions on trust.

‘No. I only question her motive. Without knowing that I could not, I should have no right, to question her judgment.’

What an answer for a girl to make ! Hero thought, with dismay.

‘Your mother owes you no explanation of her conduct, or her motives either. Sufficient that your grandfather and I, who know them, know and approve both.’

These insubordinate symptoms troubled the grandmother, whose heart was all her child’s.

She loved Bianca dearly, but she did not love her blindly, and she loved Hero better, and would have saved her from disappointment with her heart's blood, had such vicarious salvation been possible.

‘You could sue him in the Divorce Court,’ Mr. Owen had said in the old days of his son-in-law, with bustling eagerness of assertion, and fussy vindictiveness. ‘Alimony would be granted, and a sum for the child's education, d—— him!’

‘No father. Why should I disgrace my child?’

‘Disgrace! Fiddlesticks! Let disgrace fall where it sticks. Who would think of Martello when Bianca was marriageable?’

‘Bianca might. People might fling her father in her face. As it is our wrongs remain private, and no one has the right to insult us with them.’

‘Insult ye?’ shouted Mr. Owen, his Hibernian blood coming out in his accents of scorn; ‘it would be once, and not again, I can tell you, for Garry Owen's not the man to stand by and see a lady insulted!’

‘Having taken the child, and gone without leave, I have no right to ask him for anything,’

Hero said. ‘Besides, you know as well as I do that he has nothing to give, and that an injunction such as you speak of would be mere waste-paper.’

Seeing how much more Hero could make by her superb voice than the impecunious Martello would be likely to allow her, Mr. Owen let the subject drop, saying that women must always have the last word; but when Bianca’s precocious intelligence warned her mother that it was time for her to remodel the course of her existence, if she would have the girl remain a stranger for ever to the publicity she herself hated, Mr. Owen’s indignation knew no bounds.

‘Throwing away splendid emoluments, and the chances of a brilliant marriage for some sentimental absurdity about this brat of a child, that ought to be lapping porridge in an attic!’ he cried angrily, and perhaps not altogether unreasonably.

Marriage had ceased to be a possibility in Hero’s life. Martello was dead. She was free. But her heart was as irrevocably pledged as if a bishop and unlimited incumbents and assistant-curates had combined, at the height of a London season, to tie the holy bands in the

most fashionable of matrimonial knots with the aid of several dozen bridesmaids.

'We shall be no burthen to you, papa,' Hero answered, following the train of her own thoughts rather than reflecting on the parental liberality. Her little independent capital, derived from her unknown uncle, de Courteville, she thought, would one day be Bianca's marriage portion, and she determined on working as hard as health and home duties would permit, so that her child might never feel she had achieved happiness at her mother's expense.

Hero received pressing invitations to sing, during the season, at private parties. But to mount grand staircases, find her way across gilded saloons, feel herself an object of half-contemptuous curiosity to the well-dressed but not necessarily well-bred crowd, and then fight her unattended way back to her modest brougham, a paid servant, where her birth and breeding no less than her beauty, education and manners entitled her to an undoubted equality, was an ordeal that Hero's philosophy could not calmly contemplate.

In former times her mother had accompanied her wherever she went ; but Mrs. Owen's age and the state of her health forbade this

now: and it was years since Hero had been seen, except by the ladies who knew her in her own house. Fitz was, as his aunt had said, as a younger brother to her. He watched these two good women with a reverent admiration and pity that lent an affection to his tone, of which he himself was unaware. Was Bianca, too, to be sacrificed, he asked himself, as these had been? two out of the thousands of social (women) martyrs of whom the world knows nothing? When the time came for Bianca to make her choice, was it to be left to these two weak, unworldly women to judge whether the man she elected to honour was worthy of her young unsullied soul? What do women, at best, know of men, their manner of life, their pursuits and private occupations? Women, happily married, need know nothing; their husbands, the fathers of their girls, know, yet scarcely care to regale their wives with backstairs histories of other men's lives.

Fitz could not trust Mr. Owen with such a momentous matter as Bianca's future. An inquiry as to the man's income, and the assurance that he was not a bigamist, would suffice this gay optimist; and Bianca, allowed to follow the first impulses of an ignorant predilection, might

fall a worse victim than either her mother or grandmother had done.

Fitz told himself that he would not stand in the girl's way, nor seek to establish any understanding with her before others were in the field ; but he would watch over her, and, God willing, eventually win her for his own.

At Sprudelheim he had been much exercised on the score of Bianca's independent friendships, but had not seen his way to any sort of interference. Hero, occupied with Mrs. Owen, seemed to dread confining the girl to an invalid atmosphere ; and life at a watering-place is always a more or less free-and-easy state of existence, abandoned perforce when people return to the routine duties of home.

Hudson's undisguised admiration opened up new possibilities in Fitz's eyes, and he set a guard upon himself lest he should be tempted by his secret feelings to betray how deeply he was interested in the issue of the young man's suit.

Above all things he dreaded lest Mrs. Owen or Hero should quote him as a mentor or censor, thus placing him in a ridiculous and unpleasant light in the young girl's eyes, and he grew doubly careful lest unwary criticism should betray him to his ruin.

Still, he was too clear-sighted, too fond of Bianca, too jealous of and for her, too much a man, and a lover, not to be keenly alive to the fact that she had made an immense stride in independence of character; whilst, he noted with regret, that of preference she sought the society of 'foreigners,' declaring English people to be as stiff and wooden-jointed as Dutch dolls, incapable of enthusiasm, and intensely and disgustingly selfish.

Now, that he was going down to Fairholt, his heart a little misgave him. What if, favoured by *tête-à-tête* drives and walks, and smiled upon by kind Mrs. Hudson, the young people should have fancied they were indispensable to one another's happiness, and be even now on the brink of an engagement and consequent matrimony?

Hudson met him at the station,

'You will be awfully dull old fellow,' he said, 'the frost shuts up everything.'

'It will not shut me up. Don't you skate?'

'Rather. I am teaching Bi—— Miss Martello.'

Bianca greeted her cousin with the same easy unconscious friendliness that she had shown

him since her babyhood. 'How are they at home?' she asked. 'I wish the motherkin had come with you. She almost said she would.'

'No; she cannot leave my aunt.' Then, after a pause, 'I fear my aunt is very ill, Bianca.'

But the young are never apprehensive. Life to them is one vast, bright, shining possibility. Besides, there were reasons, undreamt of in Fitz's philosophy, why Bianca did not wish to talk of her grandmother.

Fitz, as was but natural in a lover, watched the young people, without discovering anything. Bianca assumed a rather dictatorial tone to her youthful adorer, and there was too much bandying of jests for any serious love-making, so that Fitz never felt himself to be the 'third wheel on the waggon.'

He also watched for the appearance of his bracelet, as a signal of his lady's favour, but though one or two evening festivities afforded the opportunity for adornment, Bianca neither wore nor alluded to his gift.

Two slight matters set Fitz thinking.

The day before he was to leave Fairholt, Bianca came down late to breakfast.

'Pass this letter to Miss Martello,' said

Hudson, laying a thin, long, highly-scented envelope on an empty plate.

Fitz could not help seeing that it was a foreign letter. The peculiar niggling, characterless handwriting, the enormous monogram, and the variegated stamps, told as much as that.

‘From mamma?’ asked Bianca, at the end of the table.

‘No. A foreign letter. A Russian letter.’

And Bianca’s pale, clear face became suddenly crimson.

‘By Jove! those Russians know everything. How the deuce could they know you were here?’ Hudson exclaimed, in his boyish way, not looking at Bianca’s face. She put the letter down, unopened, beside her plate.

‘You correspond with Madame de Kerezoff?’

‘Yes.’

Her face was now as pale as it had before been red.

Fitz looked at her as he spoke.

‘Why,’ Hudson exclaimed, ‘what a fool I am; of course, I had forgotten, or I should have remembered.’

‘What?’ asked Fitz. For the ingenious youth, suddenly catching Bianca’s gaze fixed

angrily upon him, in his confusion fell into a fresh error, then suddenly stopped short.

'Why, Sprudelheim—and—and—the Kerezoffs, of course.'

But Fitz knew there was something more in the matter than met the eye, though he abstained from pursuit of a disagreeable topic.

Bianca left her letter beside her plate as though it were of no importance; but she was short and snappish to Hudson all day, so that her cheerful swain became at length crushed and dispirited, and took himself off for a solitary ride on pretext of some neglected social duties in the neighbourhood.

With his disappearance Bianca's spirits rose. She laughed and chatted with Fitz, and gaily challenged him to a game at billiards.

She exerted herself to please him; was playful and sweet and saucy by turns; and that, in such a gracious, maidenly manner that the young man began to think he had been mistaken all along, and that the cause of her listlessness and pre-occupation had been purely physical.

Happy and hopeful, and encouraged by the girl's gay, good humour, he ventured on a few words more nearly approaching tenderness

than any he had ever yet addressed to her. It is never a very graceful thing for the donor to allude to a gift which the recipient has ignored.

Fitz felt this, but at the same time he felt something else yet more strongly; and thus, after confessing himself beaten at chess and draughts, which had followed the billiards, he said: 'If my conqueror will stoop to a gracious act, defeat will lose all its bitterness.'

'A conqueror can always afford to be gracious.'

'Then, Bianca, oblige me; show me by wearing my bracelet at the party this evening that you really liked it, and have some regard for the giver.'

In his eagerness and anxiety he laid a hand on her wrist, as though in fancy he saw the bracelet already there.

But she shook his touch off angrily.

'I cannot oblige you,' she said, offence and embarrassment unmistakable in every tone.

'Have I offended you, Bianca? If so, I am sure I beg your pardon.'

'It is granted.'

But he noticed the offence implied was not denied.

‘But have I offended you?’

‘No.’

‘Then why will you not wear my bracelet? I bought it for you the day you admired it so much at Sprudelheim.’

There was an awkward pause. He expected her to relent. She did not look at him.

‘I think you ought to tell me if I have offended you,’ he said, not without dignity.

‘I am not offended—only——’

‘Only?’

‘Well, if there is to be all this fuss about it, I had rather you had not given it to me.’

‘Is it I who have made a fuss? I think you are unjust Bianca, and ungenerous. Perhaps I was wrong to allude to it at all. But I meant no harm. Between cousins there should be no false pride. If I have offended you I heartily beg your pardon.’

He hoped that in reply she would say she had not meant to hurt him, and that she would wear his bracelet that evening in token of her unaltered friendly feeling. But nothing was further from Bianca’s thoughts.

‘You do not answer, Bianca—you say nothing?’

‘Well—of course it was very kind of you, and I dare say it seems capricious, but—to tell the truth—I hate jewellery!’

‘Then your note meant nothing?’

‘It meant that you were very kind. How could you know I had altered my mind? I mean to be like mamma. She never wears jewellery.’

CHAPTER XIII.

‘THE STREET OF SAINTED JOSEPH.’

It has been said that every man, however prosaic, has his ideal. Great men have been found after their death to have formulated touchingly modest personal aspirations. ‘Mine,’ says the poet, ‘be the cot beside the hill,’ and the companionship of ‘Lucy, in her russet gown and apron blue.’ These conditions fulfil all he desires from the point of view of female society, or accomplished destiny. Royal personages long, or think they long, for the equality of friendship. ‘*Such* a new thing for her to *dare* to be unguarded in conversing with anybody,’ wrote a lady of her Court, referring to the newly-found married happiness of the fair young Maiden Queen, whose girlhood had already felt the ‘lonely splendour’ of the Crown. And whether we take the respectable figure of Farmer George and his little

frugal German spouse, partaking of a boiled leg of mutton and turnips, and studying the profound problem of the apple-pie ; or the graceful form of Marie Antoinette acting the milkmaid, or the shepherdess at the Little Trianon ; or her lethargic spouse doing locksmith's work at Versailles, we may be sure we have stumbled upon a very common phase of the 'undress' aspirations of the great ones of the earth.

To that conspirator whose obvious day is passed in official uniform ; to the Nihilist, disguised as the colonel of a regiment, the aide-de-camp of the parade-ground, the chamberlain of the palace, or the admiral of the fleet, whose spurs and sabre, galloon and golden key, are the insignia of present safety, midnight meetings, mysterious watch-words, dangerous signals and deathly risks may afford sufficient contrast to the pipe-clay and trappings, the red-tape and buckram of the regulation routine life. To many a man whose existence is bounded by the narrow confines of the barrack or the bureau, the alternative of desperate enterprises and possible ruin may afford overwhelmingly attractive features, from

the mere force of contrast. Thus, at any rate for many years, it had been with Mellin.

Born of many generations of bureaucracy and militarism, educated in the most strenuous traditions of Imperialism, the descendant of a long-suffering, loyal and Conservative family, his outward *tenue* had all the inexpressive passivity of scrupulous officialism. His spare figure, colourless face, pale eyes and negative countenance succeeded to admiration in conveying the vaguest of impressions. Long habits of reticence, caution and silence had given him an unobtrusive, retiring manner, not devoid of dignity; and although he conversed not unwillingly on all except political subjects, after several hours spent in his society it was but a shadowy and uncertain picture of his mind that acquaintances carried away from the *rencontre*.

‘Baron Mellin has the power of extracting all colour from conversation,’ Madame de Kerezoff declared to Hero, in one of her, not infrequent, moods of expansiveness.

‘Perhaps we weary him with our frivolities and platitudes; perhaps it is our English chatter which appears to him characterless,’ Hero replied. ‘I often blame myself for falling

back so selfishly upon our mother-tongue ; but I forget, when with you—you speak it so well—that it is not yours. Still, it must be very dull for Baron Mellin, though perhaps fortunate for us, that he possesses this power of abstraction.’

‘Perhaps,’ answered Julie, looking at Hero absently as she echoed her words. And after a minute she added : ‘I adore ignorance. My parrot’s tongue can patter any language in the vernacular of lady’s-maids and nurses. I confess it is a comfort to me to know I can rattle on in English and not disturb Monsieur de Mellin’s philosophic reflections. My indiscretions—conversational indiscretions, of course, I mean—would be too much for him.’

Strange as it may appear, Mellin’s ideal, hereditary hatreds notwithstanding, had always been the safe, sheltered and dignified life of an English gentleman. A few paternal acres, flocks and herds, milk and wool, pastoral pleasures, ‘study and ease together mixed,’ Virgilian joys, Horatian culture, and a sympathetic friend or two at his modest board, seemed to him the *summum bonum* of earthly bliss. No bad ideal. Lovely indeed, and peaceful when compared with the obscure anxieties of his

dual existence, and sufficiently impossible of realisation to give added beauty to the pictured joys of his romance.

Hereditary hatreds, equally notwithstanding, his ideal woman was the Englishwoman. The *grande dame* of St. Petersburg society, educated in all the traditions of Muscovite veneer, the thin French polish of exotic manners and the superficial accomplishments which scarcely disguised the vacuity and poverty of the uncultured nature beneath, was scarcely so repellant, in her negative fine ladyism and intellectual idleness, to him, as the emancipated female, the modern product of Nihilism and ‘advanced ideas.’ The one at least retained something of her womanhood, and appealed to you through her very weakness and insufficiency ; whereas the other, with her ‘billy-cock’ hat, her ulster, her *pince-nez*, her close-cropped hair, stiff shirt-collar, manly cravat, whip or walking-stick, bold stare, and independent carriage—like that of an impudent boy whose swagger needs a severe lesson—caused Mellin a shudder of revulsion which it needed all his practised powers of dissimulation successfully to disguise.

Yet the ideal Englishwoman whose image he

fondly, if silently and hopelessly, cherished, was not the insipid beauty of 'Keepsake' memory, nor the preposterous blue-veiled and be-ringletted '*Miladi*' of French comedy and romance; still less the angular '*Mees*' who screeches '*shocking!*' in season and out of season, through unrelenting decades of French plays and novels; but the English woman, companion and friend of the English man; such as our Chaucer, Surrey, Wyatt, Shakespeare, Jonson, Milton; and, in later days, our Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Tennyson have painted her. Sweet, spirited women, gentle, generous ladies, modest maidens, fresh and fair, and fragrant as the country of their birth.

The hard actualities of life had left Mellin but little time for thoughts of love; yet even during a six weeks' stay in England, towards the end of the London season, two weeks in town and four in the shires, had offered him a fair procession of what England has best to show in the way of worth and beauty. That had, in sooth, been 'a dream of fair women,' with an all too sudden awakening. The bright vision of homes of peace and wealth, of refinement and comfort; of mothers, scarcely

less beautiful than their daughters—fathers and sons equally frank, kind, honest and true. The memory of such an experience did not pass away. It abode with him, and the tender tones of colour and sound remained unaffected by the chill touch of Time—a cherished recollection. A proof of the man's strength of character—of that character which the superficial might have labelled 'negative'—lay in the fact that he had positive resolution sufficient never to refer, in Hero's or Bianca's presence, to that paradisaical past, the one romance of his life—impossible, beautiful. When at Sprudelheim, he was introduced to Hero by Madame de Kerezoff, though years had elapsed since he last saw her, and then under a different name, his long habits of observation enabled him to recognise her at once. For reasons of his own he determined not to refer to that episode, much as it would have enlarged their subject of conversation, but to let things take their course.

Life, in Russia, is bounded by large horizons. Once outside St. Petersburg or Moscow, or any other town which the traveller may choose to recall or imagine, vast, limitless

plains stretch away in level uniformity, monotonous, melancholy, immense.

The solitary peasant, the lonely shepherd, gazes up at you from his sheepskins or his *touloupe*, and, in an accent pitched to a minor key, wishes you in soft, pathetic inflections a wondering 'Good-day.' Why should you put yourself to the expense and inconvenience of travel, expose yourself to the extortion of innkeepers, the heat of frowsy hostelries, cheating *moujiks*, and exorbitant charges? And vaguely commiserating you,—whom he reckons one of the great ones of the earth, in your pictured difficulties,—the herdsman gazes in your face, prince or potentate though he dreams you to be, with the sympathy and pity of a gentle brotherly soul. In the villages you pass through, it may be that now and again some Russian *Volkslied* falls upon the ear. Weeks afterwards you will find yourself haunted by its pathetic rhythm, by its yearning refrain, and you will wonder why this half-barbaric song has the power to absorb you, and touch you by its appealing, plaintive melody. It is as though some unknown spirit of fraternity stretched its arms forth across the dreary miles of waste and wild, murmuring:

‘I, too, despite our widely-differing experiences, am thy brother. From the deep forests and silent plains, from Siberian mines and Tartar steppes, from the dim Caucasian peaks, from Aryan myths and empires of utmost Ind, shrouded in the mists of immemorial ages, I call to thee, across Time and Space, out of the depths of my unheeded century-old solitude!’

In this vast, mysterious country, where all the Russias, and each, has its qualifying adjective, where the styles and titles of Cæsar read like the projected geographical course of a college term on an extended scale, the very impossibility of things suggests the possible. Rigorous ice-bound nature broods above more ardent aspirations than warm Italian skies ever ripened into an easy enthusiasm, and, beneath a winding-sheet of snow, men’s blood burns in fierce revolt, frozen though for the nonce it be into seeming silence. Under gigantic conditions, to count the pigmy items is impossible. Temperate or torrid zones may reckon with fate, but the frigid must overleap half a world, and trust to chance or fate for the result. There is a point at which cold becomes heat; and the frost-bitten sufferer seems to endure the torments of the fiery furnace.

In such a condition was Russia at the time of our story.

The snow-clad volcano might burst forth in destructive eruption at any moment, and those who knew how thin was the crust of the crater, were prepared to see the signal flames, like those of some giant watch-fire on a mountain peak, shoot up into the midnight skies, the token amidst surrounding silence, obscurity, and gloom, of a far-spreading conflagration. In old times, it took a hundred horses and seven days to travel from St. Petersburg to Moscow. To-day the journey is performed by train in fifteen hours, and your fellow travellers will probably be as 'mixed' as the company to be met in an American 'car.'

The very manner in which the railroad connecting the two capitals came to be made, is typical of the country and its rulers. Nicholas, the enemy of all progress, looked with an unfavourable eye upon the innovation of steam. His councillors were anxious so to make the iron way that it should prove a financial success, and to that end endeavoured to construct the line so that it should include several important towns in the system. The plans were laid before the Emperor. He listened

silently to the explanations of the experts, and then taking a ruler he drew a line in pen and ink between St. Petersburg and Moscow, remarking: 'The railroad will either be made on that line, or not at all.' His officials, knowing the nature of the man, knew also that remonstrance would be worse than useless. The line was eventually made as the Emperor had ruled it should be, and remains a monument of his unbending will to the present hour.

And yet, on the eve of the railway epoch, the Russian peasant would have thought the results of steam, could they have been made clear to his limited intelligence, far more impossible than the impossibilities of to-day—be they what they may—appear to eyes bent on a horizon still wider than that of the bonded serf, watching and waiting.

'The eyes of a goddess,' Monsieur de Mellin had said to himself, as Hero turned her level gaze upon him on the terrace of the hunting Schloss. He had said the same words years ago in a London drawing-room.

There had been a concert that night at the Marquis of Matlock's, and, together with his ambassador, Mellin had gone to the palace of that patron of the fine arts, in order that

he might see something of London society in all its various and varied shades and grades. The Marquis, in his character of host and connoisseur of beauty, had spoken a few gracious words to Hero after each of her songs, and the Sovereign had deigned to commission him with Her approval, as the singer withdrew after her last aria. Mellin thought Hero more beautiful than the most beautiful of the titled ladies present; and when at his request the Russian Ambassador presented him to her, the large, serious gaze of her earnest eyes seemed to the young Russian's imagination to be illumined with the wisdom of the typical Pallas Athene.

‘We know that, for us, the possible has ceased to exist,’ Julie had said to him in the Kur Garten at Sprudelheim; and, tacitly, he had recognised the truth of her epigram, and knew that he could only ‘find his reckoning’ in the impossible.

He acknowledged no other interest or claim than the interests and claims of ‘the Cause.’ For these he had not scrupled to work on Bianca’s undisciplined nature, to take advantage of her ductile enthusiasm, to profit, under high-sounding maxims, by the spirit of intrigue that ran in the southern blood which

was her inheritance. Base, ignoble ends could never have swayed the girl to the course she now blindly took. For the good of Humanity at large! What a programme! What purity of principle, what impersonal aspirations! What lofty aims and ends! How free from any claim of merit, or expectation of applause!

The Association wanted money. For money, Mellin would have sacrificed Bianca as ruthlessly as ever Spartan socialist, making proverbial history for later civilisation, would have devoted the single life to the perpetuation of the type. Hudson’s money was as good as another’s. Hudson was young and enthusiastic; a good fellow; *bon enfant*. Why should not two young people be happy together, as well as, better than, apart? Besides, the old people desired it; it was plain to see that if—with the reserve peculiar to their race—they would not make, yet, neither would they mar, this match. Bianca once implicated, the mother would follow, and thus three *âmes d’élite*, to say nothing of good English money, gained for ‘the Cause.’

Yet something in Bianca’s ardent gaze, something in her girlish enthusiasm, disturbed Mellin’s equanimity. ‘Her eyes are like her mother’s—yet how unlike!’ he said to himself,

and became colder and colder to his young disciple. 'No matter, she was but a tool,' he told himself, with that latent savagery of nature which Napoleon declared that he who scratched the Russ, might count on finding in the Tartar beneath.

It pleased Mellin—there seemed a sort of compromise with conscience, or what stood for that inconvenient monitor in his moral vocabulary—it pleased him to be harsh and short and dogmatic in his utterances, and as little sympathetic as possible in his acknowledgments to the girl. He had declared Bianca was Julie de Kerezoff's convert. He would none of her. Julie must send her the ghastly 'charm,' the sign and token of her affiliation to their 'Society.' 'It was a farce,' as he said to himself with a sneer, but 'a convenient one,' especially where women were concerned; and it was not his fault if, on the wild hill-side the Sprudelheim novice had made her profession, taking her vows in the very teeth, as it were, of warning, harshness, and discouragement.

In all things, not consciously paltering with honour, but finding some strange, insincere satisfaction in the line he had adopted, Mellin

almost forced the girl to take the initiative, throwing obstacles in her way and increasing her ardour, in proportion to the difficulties he raised. If they walked fast, it was that *she* walked fast. If they outstripped their companions, it was by her desire. She should ask him for the ‘token.’ He would not give her the accolade ; he would not instruct her in the shibboleth. She should beg him to put the grim badge about her neck. He would originate nothing. She should take the oath as a volunteer, not as a conscript. It was with something almost like contemptuous tenderness that he had on that occasion turned to Hero, offering her his arm down the hill. She must indeed be weak and blind not to suspect what was going on beneath her very eyes. The thought of her maternal weakness did not, however, dispose him more kindly towards his younger dupe. Imagination painted circumstances in which this spoiled child might become his rival and his enemy.

He divined instinctively something of the unwillingness with which Hero had accepted his arm. He had ventured on a sufficiently *banale* allusion, and had not felt sorry that the power to wound was granted him, since the

privilege to woo was denied. Then he had taunted her (he who had suborned her child) with her inability to rule. 'You ask as a favour that which you should demand as a right,' he had said; 'you will always be the victim of coarser, of more selfish natures.'

Later on, if she should reproach him (and women, he told himself, were unreasonable enough, as a rule, to attribute their blindness and folly to the fault of others rather than to their own want of prudence and foresight), he could appeal against her wrath to facts, and show her that he had warned her, and prove her conclusively to be the victim of her own confiding folly.

As the pale, hard light of the reflected snow fell upon Mellin's ashen countenance, the cold mockery of the Spring sun was scarcely less cruel than the expression of his pallid face.

A man who has no ties to bind him to his fellow-men, who declares that impersonal objects fill out his personal life, must, for all his tall-talk of universal brotherhood, of general good and public ends, grow narrow and one-sided. The emotional part of his nature starved to death, and the remembrance of personal sympathies a reproach and a shame to him in his own eyes,

he is at best but an imperfect specimen of a human being, incapable of the noblest passions and sublimest enthusiasms of humanity.

It was part of his misery that he could trust no man. As for women, if they were less selfish than men, they were more impulsive and less discreet; if more enduring and more devoted, less logical and less to be depended on. Things in the outer world had baffled all his combinations; things in the inner world, of plotting and conspiracy, had been far from satisfactory. Trade was, all over the world, bad. Money was scarce, and without the base medium the ineffectual fires of enthusiasm must pale inevitably, and 'the Cause' languish and lapse. Men, in the outer world of commerce and enterprise, were congratulating themselves on the lull that seemed to have come over the more turbulent spirits; and in the inner world of politics and diplomacy, of state-craft and governments, there seemed a blind security; whilst the divisions, heart-burnings, and disunion amongst the sworn fraternity portended a weakening of forces and threatened discomfiture to the Brotherhood.

It was but seldom that Mellin ventured, by daylight, into the Street of Sainted Joseph, but

the approach of Easter gave a pretext for some stir in the interests of his supposed trade as a huckster travelling with charms, illuminated cards, Easter eggs, and chap-books into distant outlying districts, where the peasantry were eager customers for the pedler's wares.

The residuum of the population of all great cities is pervaded by a strong family likeness, whether, in 'scum,' it rises to the surface of detected crime, or sinks, like lees, to the bottom, after the custom of unrecognised 'dregs.' It shifts according to the wash of circumstance; and thus, in its ebb and flow, affords a safe refuge for such members of society as, for cogent reasons, do not prize the advantages of a 'local habitation and a name.'

In a neighbourhood where the social grade of the inhabitants had been only a degree higher or a shade less humble, Mellin and his friends could not have found so safe an asylum as the garret in the Street of Sainted Joseph afforded them.

Even the smallest of shopkeepers are conservative in instinct, and it is the pride of a petty tradesman to point to his little shop as having been his father's and grandfather's before him, and (the Haussmann of the future

permitting) the heritage of the children’s children who shall come after.

Thus the neighbours, if by a stretch of courtesy they may so be called, who inhabited the garrets and cellars of Sainted Joseph’s Street, when last Mellin and his friends were seen there, had now all disappeared. The cobbler, his spouse, and the little cobblerkin had migrated to the great leather factory near the quays, where work, less precarious than patching the foot gear of *moujiks*, was to be found; the young seamstress overhead had gone to her last resting-place; the German fiddler had found permanent employment at one of the minor theatres; and if a few porters, wharfingers, and carters still remained, why, they were men whose daily labour was done at a distance from the kennels where they slept, and who, coming home after a day’s hard work, were little disposed to watch their neighbour’s doings or to busy themselves with their neighbour’s concerns.

The ‘International,’ that word of terror, after years of secret existence startled Europe from its lethargy of false security, when it came to resound, as it presently did, upon the public ear.

By the irony of Fate the epoch of the 'Peace Palace,' with all its 'fruitful rivalries,' was the era of the introduction of the 'International' into England. The bronze-workers and gravers of Paris made the 'Exhibition' a reason and excuse for their trip to 'perfidious Albion.' They wanted to see how far they were entitled to measure and mate themselves with the skilled artisans and decorative workmen of other countries; but they also wanted to hear something of the English system of strikes and locks-out, of work and wages, of factory-schools and ten-hours' labour bills, of co-operative stores, of demand and supply, of trade-unions, and the relation of capital and labour.

At that epoch Mellin had also been in London, and though his time had been chiefly spent in scenes far distant from workshops and artisans' clubs, he had, in virtue of his affiliation with certain secret societies, been admitted to the debates of the International Socialists, where Odger, Potter, and Lucraft had made it plain to the foreign delegates that the English workmen were, practically, far in advance of their Continental brethren—fiery oratory and frothy periods notwithstanding.

On this occasion Mellin had not spoken,

looking on rather as an amused than as an interested visitor. The discomfited vanity of the Frenchmen, who had fancied themselves masters of politics, and had formed but a contemptuous estimate of the insular barbarians' social science, struck his sense of humour as infinitely comical. It was whispered that Herzen, or Bakounine, or both, were present, and there were some who persisted in recognising the Tartar communist in Mellin; but, in truth, no man of special mark had put in an appearance, the glory of celebrity being reserved for future occasions. Ledru Rollin, who was in England at the time, smiled superior on the shortsighted aspirations of the few hot-headed inconsequent neophytes who went in deputations to invoke his aid and request his presence, seeking to draw him from his retirement in St. John's Wood to their debates in obscure taverns and convenient pothouses.

Karl Marx, by birth a French Jew of German strain, was likewise in London; but he also found no special sympathy amongst English working-men. His cool, crafty character, his cold-blooded unscrupulousness, had no attraction for, but rather held the elements of a character repulsive to the instincts of the average

Englishman. As a scholar, a linguist, and a doctor of philosophy, his subtle insight, practical intellect, and logical reasoning would have been thrown away upon a group so much in the rough as the politicians of Belleville and the Barricades. He belonged rather to the circle which included men like Blind, Freiligrath, Herzen, Kinkel, Mazzini, Arrivabene, and others, who, living in poverty and obscurity, spent their time in writing for the foreign democratic press, or in studying beneath the hospitable dome of the British Museum Library.

But Marx, if he held himself aloof from the brethren generally, was closely associated with Herzen, the editor of the Russian *Kolokol*, and the author of the 'Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia,' which book Marx saw through the press for his friend.

We have already heard Mellin's contemptuous summing-up of the socialistic merits of the Swiss, German, and French Brotherhood. There had been splits and divisions innumerable; the English and French association had been dissolved; there had been quarrelling at Geneva, and defiance in Paris. The babel of tongues had waxed furious at Lausanne, and all shouted together—Russ raging against

Teuton, Gaul against Saxon, the Latin races against the Slav, in horrible polyglot, jaw-breaking gutturals, and spluttering sibilants, until fusion, harmony and mutual aid passed into the sphere of impossibilities.

In all this Mellin had remained rather a spectator than an agitator. He had, now and again, been in the thick of it. He got a doctor's certificate to say that certain German baths were indispensable to his condition ; and, a faithful servant of the Crown, he had been let go with only the necessary formulâ of indispensable passports and red-tapeism. Once over the frontier, although it behoved him still to be cautious, he was comparatively free, and if he turned up under the name of Treib, and said he was a watchmaker, at Geneva, it could be a matter of no possible import to anyone.

Congresses at Geneva and at Lausanne showed clearly that propagandism must come to a standstill if the propagandists could not pay their printer's bills ; for as yet the society had no secret presses of its own. It would have been unsafe to attempt anything on a large scale in St. Petersburg, Paris, Vienna, or Berlin. At Geneva they enjoyed the liberty of a free press ; but, if their sheets were to be

sown broadcast over Europe, they, the sowers, must be prepared to pay skilled workmen for setting up the polyglot type.

The squabbles of detail, the personal and local disputes, had left Mellin and those working with him, cold, disgusted and unhopeful. But here was an opening, here was an opportunity for an immense and ever-spreading activity. Wherever money was wanted, women could easily be found who, by social influence, by personal gifts, and personal pressure, by smiles and softness, or by scorn and reproach, would draw the necessary coin from its hiding-places, and set the vital principle rolling in gold according to the behests of their instructors.

Mellin had always felt that to utilise the enthusiasm and power of women would be to turn to account a glut of undeveloped capital lying dormant for want of a motive power sufficiently strong to set it going. But now he could 'take occasion by the hand,' and, through the women secretly, though hitherto passively, bound to the Cause, he should be able to raise a vast amount of capital that would help the matter in hand effectually along its precarious path.

He was now brought into more familiar contact with Bakounine, a Muscovite by birth, a Tartar by name and blood, belonging to the inner circle of Russian communism as represented by Herzen, Ogareff, and others at Geneva, and presently joined by Becker, whose prison Bakounine had shared on more than one occasion; together they let the storm go by whilst they plotted and planned extensively in the interests of Russian Nihilism.

Bakounine, strong on the equality of the sexes, seized on the idea of the development of female co-operation with avidity. Women had always been mixed up in Russian intrigues, but there had been no organisation: it had been due to chance, to special circumstances, or individual influence. But now, it was incalculable what an unscrupulous propaganda might not effect, if female delegates could be made the instruments of a wide-working system of pressure.

Thus it was that Julie Kerezoff had become affiliated to the society, and, with her, thousands of women who longed for an outlet to all the aspirations and sympathies created by the condition of their own country, and by the disastrous social status of civilised women

generally. Whilst men of all countries and of all shades of opinion squabbled over local questions, and fell out on matters of detail, the Russian group held steadily together. Their annals were full of daring deeds and devoted self-sacrifice. To them it seemed that the Discontents of other nations were as social sybarites grumbling over the one crumpled rose-leaf. They did not disguise from themselves that the 'public,' as understood in England, France, Belgium, Germany, or even in Italy and Austria, had, as yet, no existence in Russia. Subtract the twenty-two millions of peasants, take away the vast population of barrack and bureau, and what remained that could be accredited as 'public opinion,' or that could numerically claim sufficient importance to justify a plea for hearing? The university students had always been in the van of progress; and the way in which women had rushed into the schools when the profession of medicine was thrown open to them, proved that the pent-up spirit of a class susceptible of higher education and training would not be slow to avail itself of increased opportunities of independence and training. Such as these must preach the propaganda; yet the classes that

could be raised and inspired were not exclusively to have their attention. Public opinion must be educated. The *bourgeoisie*, timid and apathetic, must be fostered and encouraged. The ‘middle class,’ so far conspicuous by its absence from all political movements, must be gradually inspired to recognise the fact that its interests lay in the direction of Reform. The official classes must be corrupted and undermined. The means to the end mattered little. To seduce some great official and hopelessly compromise his future, was well worth the sums which the propaganda had more than once unhesitatingly offered to some siren *à la mode*, to some *diva* of the Opera, sworn to the service of ‘the Cause.’ Why were great ladies great, if not to show the power of wealth and grace and charms? And what harm if in intimate circles romantic stories of handsome, ardent Nihilist students, and court dames, or resplendent, unattainable princesses, lent a whispered flavour to the *chronique scandaleuse* of Nihilism, the piquancy of which lost nothing by the apparent incongruity of the exciting details?

And Mellin, as he sits revolving these and other matters in the cold spring sunshine,

awaits two, it may be three, visitors, in his humble garret, such as the Street of Sainted Joseph rarely sees ; each, in her way, destined to play no unimportant part in the annals of ' the Cause.'

CHAPTER XIV.

BIANCA.

IN London the same cold spring sunshine and bleak east wind sent wayfarers hurriedly through the streets. It had been a long, hard winter, and it was a long, hard spring; but the lengthening April days told Londoners that the busy season was near, and that in a few weeks the crowded streets would testify to the fulness of town.

In the large, light drawing-room everything looked cold and hard and inhospitable. No dexterous hand had draped the hangings, drawn the blinds, or stirred the fire into a cheerful blaze. A woman's hand and a woman's instinct would have placed a few flowers, pale and scentless though the early blossoms of the year might be, in the empty vases; have pushed the furniture into some semblance of grace and comfort; whilst needle-

work, magazines, and music would have betrayed a woman's presence.

Fitzgerald felt the sadly-altered aspect of the familiar room, and understood and sympathised with all that its changed aspect expressed; yet he told himself, at the same time, that he would combat, even at the risk of seeming hard and unfeeling, the condition of mind it betrayed; and that, not of indifference, but of conviction; not from want of sympathy, but out of the deepest sympathy and the tenderest affection.

The door opened and Hero came in.

‘I am afraid I have kept you waiting. I was at the top of the house. You know what these tall London houses are.’

‘As to my waiting, that is of no consequence. But why were you at the top of the house?’

The tears rushed to her eyes.

‘I cannot sit here all alone,’ she said.

‘No, perhaps not. But my uncle is sometimes at home, and Bianca will soon be coming.’

To this she made no reply. Her face expressing as plainly as silent language could: ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’

‘I know what you would say,’ Fitz went

on, speaking rapidly ; ‘ you have removed all *Her* belongings as too sacred for common use, too precious to risk their profanation by the common touch. I know that to you “ all the place is dark, and all The chambers emptied of delight ; ” but sooner or later, the effort has to be made ; sooner or later we have to come back to the old order of things, and, believe me, the sooner the better—in a sense the easier.’

‘ What does that matter, where all is so hard, so utterly hard and cruel ? And what can you know—I don’t mean to be unkind—but you have your mother still ! I know your father was kind, and of course you mourned him ; but what son—what young man—who in the world, could feel as I do ? Oh, Fitz ! you knew her, and you know what need I had of her love, and what that love was to me. And yet, even to you, I feel almost harsh and resentful, hard and impatient, when you seem as though you would bid me be consoled ; would tell me “ loss is common,” and I dread lest you, too, should repeat all the thousand well-meant complacent things by which our friends think to check the course of grief. Don’t you see that the fear is not of our grieving too much,

but of our never being able to grieve enough? I, at least, feel like that. Her great untiring love, which never forsook me during all the long years of my life—and some were bitterly long—cannot be forgotten in a few short weeks. Thirty years hence—doesn't it seem awful to think of living so long?—thirty years hence, if I am still alive, I shall feel there is a great debt of love and gratitude yet unpaid; a debt I never can pay even if I live to be an old, old woman.'

'I do not want to hurt you, Hero. I wish I knew how to comfort you.'

'People mean well, I know; but to me there seems something cruel and cowardly in these attempts at consolation. Why should one not grieve? We have lost our most precious earthly possession and yet we are to feel no sorrow. Or we are to hustle our grief out of sight, and pretend to be the same as we were before sorrow overwhelmed us. It is cruel—cruel!'

'You have a child, Hero!'

'I know. I *have* her. It is for that which we have not——'

'And—God forbid that I should preach—but you ought to consider what She who is

gone would, under the circumstances, have thought the best.'

'I know. But She always let me grieve when I had real cause for grief. She would not begrudge me my tears now. She would know—as no one else does, or can.'

'Do not be vexed that we wish to comfort you, Hero.'

She shook her head sadly.

'Have you seen Graham?' he asked, after a pause.

He would try every point of interest despite her impatience to return and brood over her grief.

'Not since—since Then.'

'Poor fellow. I am so glad I brought him up the last time I came.'

There was a pause. Evidently conversation would not flow in that direction.

'May I send you some flowers? I have been ordering some for my mother,' and again, as the last word inadvertently escaped his lips, he felt he had blundered, and the colour rose to his vexed face.

But Hero, seeing his discomfiture and pain, laid her hand on his.

'Never mind, Fitz; it was kindly meant.

But not now. This room I always looked on as hers ; there she sat, that was her chair ; she loved to have flowers and children, and birds, and all beautiful, bright, innocent things about her. I have no one to make the room pretty for now ; no one to please.'

'You forget Bianca.'

'No, I don't. But the young, in the very fact of their youth, have everything. They feel so secure of the happiness their elders have missed ; they deem they are so much wiser, that the trouble we take in trying to please them seems superfluous. Ah, Fitz ! it is the old folks nowadays who are humble, and simple, and easily pleased. Some little commonplace act of conventional grace from the young ; a pot of flowers, a birthday card, and they are delighted, and endow the child or grandchild that remembers them with a thousand virtues and graces. If I must trim up the desolate room for Bianca, it *shall* be for Bianca, though the child will never guess the cost of the sacrifice. For my own part, I could never, willingly, inhabit it again.'

As the pitiless sun shone upon Hero, sparing no single line set by sorrow and sickness in her face, Fitz became painfully aware of the change

that grief and loss had wrought in this fair woman. Her black dress, made of some heavy thick material resembling a dense sort of crape, fell in large straight folds to her feet. Her beautiful white hands, so like her mother's, whose clasp, strong and firm, seemed ordinarily expressive of help and comfort, now lay limp and unoccupied on her lap. She wore no beads, bracelets, or trimmings; no earrings, crosses, or locketts; not because she thought it wrong to do so, but because to put on this terrible black gown seemed at present as much as she could endure, as much as it was necessary she should accomplish. A narrow white line at the throat and wrists relieved the universal gloom of her attire, which was, Fitz thought, with the true masculine abhorrence of 'mourning,' almost conventual in its uncompromising simplicity.

For the first time in his life Fitz realised that Hero—still beautiful as she was—had passed beyond her youth, and it was with almost a passion of pity that he understood all the barrenness of her past, and all the solitude of her future.

He knew that a thousand reminiscences, the experiences of daily life, lived together,

would never be referred to by her again ; that in all the dreary outlook there must be subjects on which Hero's lips would be for ever sealed ; facts as to which she must henceforth be entirely dumb. He, a young man, strong in the hopes of an ardent youth, and unsullied Manhood, for whom the fair possibilities of life yet lay in the untried future, was by a generous intuition able to understand the long loneliness of this mourning woman. Still in her prime, yet standing on the brink of an eternal silence, through which, at best, only vague, sad voices of the past could now and again re-echo, in melancholy cadence, startling the caves of memory.

‘Since you would not come to luncheon with us,’ Fitz said, breaking, as it were, with an effort through his chain of thought, ‘I wrote saying I would come to you. And,’ he added, after a pause, ‘it was about Bianca that I wanted to speak to you.’

If he expected Hero to be roused by his abrupt address he was evidently mistaken. It was so natural that he should speak to the mother of the child, so entirely what she expected.

‘Yes?’

‘There are things, Hero, that one cannot speak of, and for that reason I don’t speak of them, but I think you will understand me all the same?’

He paused a moment, wondering whether she would understand the drift of his vague allusions; and again Hero moved her head in acquiescence.

‘—— So that you know I am speaking against my own interests if I ask when Bianca is to come home?’

The colour flushed up into her pale cheeks as Hero answered by another question.

‘You come from your mother?’

‘Not at all. Neither my mother nor Bianca know of my coming.’

The brief flash of emotion, the quick sensitiveness of a mother who sees her child an undervalued, slighted, perhaps unwelcome guest, died out, and, almost as listlessly as before, Hero repeated her monosyllabic query.

‘Yes?’

‘And so you must take what I say to you at no more than it is worth. It means exactly that, and nothing more.’

‘I understand.’

‘When is Bianca to come home?’

‘Neither your mother nor Bianca have sent you, you say? Allow, Fitz, that your question is a little odd; a little startling. Do you want to get rid of Bianca?’

‘As one wants to get rid of the sunshine and the flowers!’

‘Use some other simile,’ Hero answered, looking round the big bare room. Ah! how willingly would she have banished the sunshine! How long it would be before she could again bear the sight of flowers!

‘No; the simile is good enough. Forgive me, Hero; it is you who are out of harmony, out of tune with nature.’

‘Nature is cruel!’

‘Granted. But you are not answering my question. When is Bianca to come home?’

‘This is no place for her.’

‘Not by her mother’s side? Are you just, Hero? I want to be so; but, frankly, to me you seem neither just nor kind.’

‘Men judge in that way. You only see what you see.’

‘When is Bianca to come home?’

‘If my aunt still likes to have her, it is better she should stay away. You say I am not just; but to my thinking it would be

utterly unjust to bring a bright young nature into this gloom, this blank, this solitude, and expect sympathy of it.'

'Make the gloom and solitude less.'

'You ask too much of me!' Hero cried, with a passionate outburst of resentful weeping. 'You ask a sacrifice for which there is no need! I am weary of this eternal strangling of self, the good as well as the bad, the true as well as false! I am weary of this incessant sacrifice to youth! Let us sacrifice to the old at last, at length, by way of a change! Now that it can no longer do them any good, when they have passed beyond the assurance, and our love can comfort them no more, and our devotion comes, like everything else in this world—too late! The young have all their lives before them. Why should we implant and foster in them the ruthless selfishness which is the shame and the sin and the crime of this generation? We give them no chance of being modest, reverent, and generous. When we—when I and my generation—were young, we were taught to consider our elders, to respect their wishes, to await their pleasure; whilst now, if trouble comes to parents, it must be hidden from the sons and daughters; if money

cares, whomsoever may want, the young people must not go without ; if illness—keep the sick-room door tightly closed ; if death—tears and grief are depressing ! Unclose the shutters, take a trip to the sea-side, and be sure your mourning is becomingly made ! No, Fitz ! I am of my generation, you of yours. Do you think if my mother had lost *me*, She would have displayed all the admirable philosophy you advocate ? I hate myself for my hardness as I speak (how differently she would have spoken, dear mother !), but it is the impatient selfishness of this generation that makes me bitter. Do you think my mother's life was such a happy one, so well filled with what a woman holds dearest, that I can dismiss it with that decent and complacent grief that is but a mockery of real woe, as a thing fitly fulfilled, appropriately concluded ? Ah ! how different it would have been had the case been reversed !' And Hero's sobs, coming thick and threefold, checked the grievous flow of words.

' Bianca wants to come to you. She suffers from being kept away. She writes to you, and doubtless she says more than I can ; but I thought it might comfort you to know that she is longing to be with you.'

‘I believe it.’

‘Then why not let her come? Why punish yourself and her?’

But Hero was on her guard. Nothing should wring from her the confession that she felt herself unable longer to suffice to her child; that the girl’s heart had gone after ‘strange gods,’ and that the impatience she had already shown of the day of small things, would run the risk of being dangerously developed by the enforced dulness of this house of sorrow. To abate the gloom in order to suit the caprices of a spoiled child seemed to Hero, in the first bitterness of her bereavement, little short of sacrilege, and in her present mood, every word of her own and Bianca’s that had not been syllabled by love, rose up and reproached her as an act of cruel ingratitude and lovelessness, towards her dear, dead mother.

It was unfortunate that the latest intercourse between her mother and her child had left a painful impression on Hero’s mind. She had, secretly, resented what she thought the suspicions of age in Mrs. Owen’s reference to Bianca’s correspondence and understanding with the Kerezoffs; at the same time that she

had felt more bitterly than she would confess, the pain of being supplanted by strangers in her child's heart.

Juster and more far-sighted, Mrs. Owen had striven to show her that, if she had erred in giving Bianca too much liberty, she would err yet more in resenting the foreign influence that had crept in, owing to her own want of vigilance. But Hero had taken the thing from another side. Not resentment, but utter depression and a dispirited resignation, marked the attitude of her mind. Bianca's secret correspondence had superinduced in her mother a sense of profound discouragement, against which, for the present, she vainly struggled.

‘What ! am I to watch and suspect my own child ?’ she had cried in a paroxysm of despair. ‘Why, it is the way to make her deceitful ! What should I have been, mother, if you had watched and suspected me ?’

‘Italian, and Irish, and French blood does not flow in Bianca's veins for nothing ; she was bound by the accidents of birth to be something of a conspirator.’

‘No ! I could not do it ! I would not, if I could ! Would that secure my child's love to me ? O mother ! you cannot mean it.’

‘I do mean it. You will have to do it, Hero. You *must* do it. It is a duty like another. You are her guardian. Is it not expecting too much, to expect a child of her age to guide herself? You must help her; anticipate her difficulties; point out the danger of these follies; help her against herself, in spite of herself.’

‘And lose her love by letting her see that I suspect her?’

‘You think too much about her love. A child has to love its mother. It will certainly not love her the less because she exacts what is just and right. It will respect her; and respect is the basis of all right kind of love. Leave the love to take care of itself. Command your child as seldom as possible, but the command once issued, insist upon its being obeyed.’

Long before Mrs. Owen’s death all personal annoyance at the discovery she had involuntarily made at Brussels had faded from her own gentle forgiving mind. ‘Our little sunshine,’ she continually called Bianca; ‘our little white lady;’ ‘our *Blanchefleur*,’ and a dozen such endearing names; but she, too, thought change would do the girl good, and was glad to

know her in the fresh country air, surrounded by safe friends and simple social pleasures. When Fitz brought the bracelet for Hero to see, Léonie looked at it for a long time, thoughtfully turning the motto round and round, with a smile in her wise, kind eyes.

‘Our winter-rose will like this;’ and, after a pause: ‘Our *petite reine blanche* has already a sovereignty of her own, with knights, and squires, and vassals at her feet. They are but boy and girl, but I am much mistaken if Bianca has not the choice of reigning at Fairholt; but—old matchmaker that I am—I should be happier to see her put her little hand into Fitz’s big honest one. She needs a guiding influence, and such a brave and upright soul commands respect, and, with women, respect, in the long run, almost certainly insures love.’

Hero, who at Sprudelheim had been nervously anxious lest Fitz’s kindly yet keen eyes should be scanning her child too judicially, and who, more than once, had detected grave disapproval in his glance, could not complacently follow her mother along this prospective path. To her mind, water and fire could as soon commingle as two such opposite natures as Bianca’s and her cousin’s. Maternal vanity

may have lurked in secret corners, unsuspected by herself, and have unconsciously influenced her; for whatever Fitz might take upon himself to blame in Bianca, was an indirect condemnation of Hero herself. And again, she shrank from the idea of any man morally dissecting her child, as she would have resented his appraising her young, fresh beauty. It seemed an intrusion. Let her mother have care of her, body and soul, whilst both were yet tender. A man's rougher estimate, and coarser judgment, should not profane the secrets of the girl's inner nature, by prying scrutiny.

When that dread blow, so long expected, and yet so unexpected at last, fell upon the Owen household, it was Fitz who at Hero's request went to fetch the child home. He had to break the terrible news to her, and to telegraph to the poor distracted mother that her child's panic terror of the Dread Presence made it impossible to bring her to the house where Death reigned supreme.

Mrs. Fitzgerald jumped at the opportunity thus offered her of semi-reconciliation with the Owen family, and Hero, fearful lest Bianca's impressionable nature should suffer by any

violence done to its instinctive horror and fear of death, acquiesced in the plan.

She did not wish to compel the child to return home. She asked for time to give herself up to her own absorbing grief. Effort, she knew, would be demanded of her later on, but for the present she gave way utterly, and sorrow held its undivided sway.

As Fitz and the terror-stricken girl journeyed up to town, she shrank against her cousin, cowering at his side for the mere comfort of human contact. She would have done the same to anyone. To Fitz, however, that journey had seemed like a dream, half pain, half-pleasure. To feel his manhood sheltering and protecting the frail young creature; to put his arm round her trembling form and draw her to him, and pillow her pale face upon his breast, stirred all that was tender and manly in his honest heart. The shadow of a great grief was upon them both, chastening all his thoughts (for Fitz had loved and revered his aunt); and, thinking nothing of himself and everything of Bianca, it sufficed him that he was helpful and needful to her in this hour of helplessness and need.

A few words Mrs. Hudson had said to him in private.

‘Bianca is a dear girl, but I think she is changed, Mr. Fitzgerald. She has something on her mind.’

Hudson, too, had his word.

‘I’m glad you’ve come, old fellow. You know I was awful “spoons” upon her, and all that; but when a girl looks persistently over the top of a fellow’s head, pot-hat and all, you may be sure he had better get himself out of the way. It may come all right, but I don’t like those letters.’

Honest Fitz said nothing against his junior’s philosophy, but secretly he found the letters a stumbling-block of offence. Hudson spoke as though there were no secret in the matter, yet it seemed impossible to ask any questions about Bianca’s private correspondence, or to discuss her doings with strangers. He shook hands warmly with mother and son, and jumped into the carriage after his weeping charge.

‘I think,’ Fitz said, returning to his proposition, for Hero had not spoken again, ‘that if you do not need Bianca, Bianca needs you.’

‘To-day, perhaps. But to-morrow she would feel all the crushing sadness of our lives;

her heart would rebel against the monotony, and she would weary of her home and her own people.'

'Surely you are unjust. But if so—still she is better, safer, with you than elsewhere.'

'Safer?' repeated Hero, her attention arrested at last. 'Is she not safe with your mother—with you?'

'In one sense, yes—in another, no.'

The little maid from Fairholt, pleasure beaming all over her fresh country face, was coming across the room with a letter on a silver tray. The paper and the metal made a bright spot against her black gown. 'A letter from Mrs. Hudson, ma'am. It has the Midhurst post-mark,' said the little maid's country voice, ignorant of London codes and conduct, and proud of her own discernment.

Hero took the letter from the tray. 'That will do, Hannah. If there is any message from your people, or anything about your home, I will tell you afterwards.' Then looking at Fitz, 'You will excuse me?' she said, and Fitz drew a little aside, taking a book from the table, whilst Hero opened Mrs. Hudson's letter.

CHAPTER XV.

‘ I FORGIVE YOU.’

THERE was silence in the room.

Fitz, his back almost turned to Hero, was deep in thought. The interruption came opportunely. It behoved him to be careful. In these delicate matters it is so much easier to mar than to make.

He left Hero to the undisturbed consideration of her correspondence.

Mrs. Hudson’s kind, commonplace (and yet not altogether simple) letter was quickly scanned. The enclosure, which, being of some size and bulk, with a large and very armorial seal, had stuck in the envelope, gave Hero a little trouble to extract from its envelope. She held it a minute in her hand—whilst the painful colour flushed her cheeks and neck—glanced at Fitz, and saw him apparently ab-

sorbed in his book ; hesitated again a second, and then with more energy than so slight a matter would have seemed to suggest, tore the letter quickly open.

‘*My dear Child,—I forgive you. All the rest, beyond heartfelt thanks, is, as your own Hamlet says, “Silence.”*’

That was all. A matter of a dozen words or so. No signature. Ah ! too hasty suspicion ; it was a mistake. The letter, addressed to someone else, had been shuffled by the good, fussy old lady into the wrong envelope. But no ! There was the direction, painfully plain, in the little laboured, niggling, foreign handwriting : ‘*A la Signorina Bianca Martello, aux soins de Monsieur Hudson, à Fairholt, près de Midhurst, Sussex, Angleterre.*’

‘*My dear Child.*’ Whose dear child ? Not her’s, not Hero’s, surely not ? Surely yes ! ‘*The Signorina Bianca Martello.*’ The letters which, erewhile, looked black, now seemed written in fire. They burned into Hero’s sight, they seemed printed in scorching characters upon her brain.

What gulf was this that had suddenly opened beneath her feet ? Who dared to share her right in Bianca, and address her as

‘My dear Child?’ Why, but now, a moment since, Fitz was here, talking of the child; of ‘*la petite reine blanche*,’ of her grandmother’s loving vocabulary, or—was it years ago? A time that had no name, no boundaries, and no limit? No to-day or yesterday? A dream-land of phantasmagoric slumbers?

‘*I forgive you.*’

‘Forgive her—*What?*’ asked the agonised, ignorant, exasperated, outraged mother. Who—now that the only one whose rights she had recognised as equal to her own, had ceased to exercise them—who dared, and by what authority, thus to assume the sacred power of parental absolution, and, with comprehensive brevity, to declare that her sins—hers, Bianca’s—were remitted to her? A mist clouded Hero’s brain as she sat in silent anguish, her pulses beating thick in her throat and at her temples.

She glanced at Fitz, who appeared to be absorbed in a book.

‘*And all the rest,*’ so the mysterious correspondent declared, was ‘*silence!*’

Was it possible? Could such things be? And with a moan of piteous anguish, an inarticulate cry of pain, like a dumb, stricken

creature in distress, Hero—reserve, pride, reticence broken down—fell forward against the arm of the sofa, conscious only of a vast despair.

Startled by the strangeness of her cry, Fitz sprang towards her. She had not fainted. Only, in her dumb anguish, in her sense of baffled misery, the need of human sympathy and human contact overcame all lesser needs, and, with groping hands, she instinctively felt for support from the very person whose counsels she had but now rejected.

Then, the first speechless suffering having found outlet in a flood of tears, much to Fitz's relief, she unreservedly appealed to him for sympathy and counsel in her sorrow. All pride and reticence were forgotten; all petty considerations cast to the winds, and in her frantic desire for aid and advice she told him all she knew.

But, after all, what did it amount to? To nothing. So she declared, not willing to deceive herself, or be yet further deceived.

Fitz, himself as pale as trouble could make a man, felt that before all things, before any consideration of his own pain, it behoved him to give her all the comfort his manhood could

convey to her appealing womanhood in that hour of distress.

‘Did you—after what took place about the letter and the charm—did you forbid Bianca to write to these people any more?’ he asked.

‘No. I thought the lesson would have been enough for her.’

‘Ah!’

‘And I was afraid to command lest she should disobey. I did not want to make it more difficult for her.’

‘Perhaps you would have made it easier for her. To plead a mother’s commands as reason and excuse, explains everything where a young girl is concerned. Don’t you see that she had no need to apologise for you? Indeed, such apologies would be unbecoming and out of place in a child on behalf of her mother.’

‘She had had such a lesson! I preferred leaving it to her own sense of right. It would have been ungracious to extort what she might offer willingly. I did not want to rob her act of its generosity—its grace.’

‘And the ornament—the charm?’

‘She refused point blank to give it up. What could I do? I thought it seemed like

breaking a butterfly on the wheel to oppose a childish fancy of the sort with any severity. Girls have a thousand fancies and passing manias which it is best not to notice.'

'This has not proved to be of the trifling order.'

'Ah! I know how much I must seem to blame. But consider, Fitz, what little difference there is in our ages. We were more like two sisters than mother and daughter; and I thought the law of love the best.'

'It is possible to think too much of love,' Fitz said, steeling himself, in his young severity, against her pleadings *ad misericordiam*.

To Hero, even in her hour of need and utter failure, this seemed 'rank blasphemy.'

'Oh, surely not!' she said in protest. 'That I have been wrong, utterly wrong and mistaken, seeing the result, how can I deny? But the law of love is best, however badly I may have succeeded in my attempt to prove its power.'

Her humility touched Fitz to the quick. 'I am sure you meant only the best, always,' he said, encouragingly; 'but, you see, you put a sore burthen on such young shoulders.'

'O Fitz! how good of you!' Hero exclaimed with a sort of divination. Intuition

told her that he was excusing Bianca at some cost to himself. In sooth he was bitterly 'disillusioned.' Here was another Richmond in the field, and in a likeness so little anticipated by him that the shock was all the greater.

Dark sayings of Reggie's, and dim hints of kind, simple Mrs. Hudson's, rose up in Fitz's mind. But he felt the need of time to sift the whole matter. He was only struggling through night to light. '*I dont like those letters,*' Reggie Hudson had said in his boyish way. And Fitz had not pursued the subject, feeling as though to do so would be indelicate, ungenerous; not wise, nor kind.

'*She has something on her mind,*' the good, motherly, simple soul had declared, as she delivered her young guest into Fitz's keeping.

And now this trouble had broken like a storm over their heads, and found both Hero and her cousin utterly unprepared to deal with it.

Fitz, arguing against his own interests, had come that very afternoon to urge upon Hero the wisdom of recalling her child; his fine instinct hinting at some undefined estrangement, since the great grief which had overwhelmed them both, instead of throwing these two into

one another's arms, had swept them silently asunder. To him it seemed alike sad and cruel, that Hero should sit alone evening after evening, beside her desolate hearth, whilst, within a circumscribed radius, her child was unconsciously growing accustomed to the separation, and sinking into a kind of life that Fitz felt was not good for a girl of her peculiar disposition.

He had come there to effect a purpose, and if, in furtherance of his amiable project, he somewhat exaggerated Bianca's desire to be once more with her mother, he did so in the hope that all the secret fibres of maternity would be stirred, and that Hero, in recalling her child, would alike find the proper outlet for her pent-up misery, and save the girl from what, in the long run, not even filial piety could call a wholesome influence.

But now? He felt that he could not be too thankful some blind prophetic instinct of caution had sealed his lips, at home, as to to-day's intended visit; that he could meet his mother and Bianca at dinner and make no sign.

To suggest that Bianca should return was now out of the question. They must wait and see what best could be done.

'Shall you send Bianca that letter?' he asked.

'No.'

'Shall you write to her on the subject?'

'No. O Fitz, how can I?'

'Well, perhaps not.'

'Tell me what I am to do.'

'We must wait and see. I must think.'

'You will come to me again to-morrow morning early, or I shall go mad. Remember, I am all alone!'

'I do remember it,' he answered, taking her hand.

'And—Fitz—you will not say anything to—to anybody?'

'Certainly not.'

'Not to your mother?'

'No.'

'Nor to her—to Bianca. It might do endless mischief. Nor—if you should see him—nor to Graham?'

'Nor to Graham. Though—mind—he is so wise and kind, so just and generous, you could have no better counsellor at such a juncture.'

'Oh, no, no!' Hero exclaimed.

This man, who ought to have been her

child's next friend, was the last being in the world to whom she could reveal any flaw in a character which she fondly wished him to believe perfect.

Graham, who knew that no such thing as perfection existed, would probably have liked Bianca none the less for her 'touch of earth ;' but Fitz understood and appreciated the mother's jealousy on this point.

'I may speak to Bianca herself, should occasion offer, openly on the subject?'

'Yes.'

'Of your's and of her grandmother's remonstrances, and of this letter enclosed by Mrs. Hudson?'

'Yes.'

'Meanwhile, how will you account to her for not writing? For I apprehend you will not be able to do so, as though nothing had occurred, and that you will, under the circumstances, prefer silence to what you may think insincerity.'

'I will take my father to Brighton or Richmond for a few days' change, and my notes will be mere routine notes of excuse. That will be the best.'

'Bad's the best.'

‘O Fitz! if you only knew——’

‘But you must not give in. All will come right. Believe me. I promise you. Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye. God bless you, Fitz!’

‘God bless you! And be of good cheer.’
And Fitz stooped and kissed his cousin’s cold hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

‘ A DAUGHTER OF THE GODS, DIVINELY TALL
AND MOST DIVINELY FAIR.’

THERE is a certain type of beauty which cannot be disguised. It is so striking, so exquisite, so accomplished, that neither rags nor poverty, neither climate nor costume, can modify its intrinsic perfection, neither can age wither nor custom stale its infinite variety.

Perhaps this was the reason that the Countess Helena Perowska attempted no sort of disguise in her visits to the garret of the Street of Sainted Joseph.

What peasant costume could have hidden the harmonious symmetry of her stately presence? How could the clear outline of her delicately-tinted face have been accepted as that of a daughter of toil? Those slender hands, with their rosy palms and tapering fingers, would have alone betrayed her; and

therefore she judged wisely in making no attempt to obscure her radiant loveliness.

She presented the rare anomaly of a religious bigot and a Nihilist combined ; and, as an uncommon variety of the species, claims a few special words as to her past, and as to the reason of her presence in the reputed chapman's garret.

Brought up in the rigid forms of the strictest Greek orthodoxy, the daughter of a House that claimed for itself the prestige of having reigned imperially in legendary times, and of having, historically, distinguished itself by an unswerving fidelity 'to the reigning dynasty,' one of a large household of daughters, the beautiful Helena had made a stir, even in a family where beauty was a prerogative of birthright. Her education had been something other, and better, than the usual French polish, the thin lacquer and veneer of superficial accomplishments and shallow smatterings taught in the fashionable institutions of St. Petersburg. She had travelled, as a young girl, with her parents in Europe ; she had had an excellent and sensible English governess ; and her greatest friend was a young Englishwoman married to a German official at the Russian

Court. She was romantic, proud, impulsive, and yet cold. She was so dazzlingly fair, so beautiful and graceful, so soft and serene, that to have the privilege of gazing upon her, in the bloom of her young loveliness, as at some work of art standing in its dedicated shrine, seemed, to the modest spectator, no despicable advantage.

From travel and from intercourse, from reading and conversation, she had unconsciously imbibed large and liberal ideas. Naturally inclined to enthusiasm, she flung herself with ardour into the only enthusiasm at that time possible to her. Religion with her was ecstasy ; loyalty a passion ; and she worshipped the Sovereign with a romantic devotion such as caused the faithful followers and adherents of our own royal and reckless Stuarts to eventually ruin themselves in a thankless cause.

Not that there was in her case any prospect of contingent ruin implied by the fact of her devotion to Imperial Cæsar. To her it almost seemed as if the divinity ‘that doth hedge about a king’ sat visibly upon his lofty brow, and shone out in the soul-piercing yet melancholy eyes.

The lustrous liquid gaze that rested so flat-

teringly, so complacently, and yet so mournfully upon her own fair young face, could not but touch her profoundly. She would, in the innocent enthusiasm of her girlish devotion, have gladly laid her head upon the block at His command, nor thought His approval dearly won by the sacrifice.

His isolation upon an unapproachable pinnacle, as it were, of solitary glory, seemed to her the most pathetic of lonelinesses. Who could dare to be his friend? Who might not venture to be his enemy? And what was life worth, lived for the World, for the Public, for his subjects; lived for the army, the church, the family, the throne, but not lived for Himself?

Her exquisite and extraordinary beauty caused a flutter in Court circles when, at eighteen years of age, she was presented to the Empress Dowager, to the reigning Empress, and all the Imperial family. Regulation court-mourning was just at the time of her presentation the order of the day, and a murmur of admiration went round as the lovely *débutante* made her curtsy. Her golden-brown hair was wreathed with Russian violets, her white crape dress caught up with bunches of the

same flower, and tiny white plumelets ; her exquisite arms and neck rivalling in uniformity and purity of tint the priceless pearls she wore. Modest, gentle, and dignified, there was at once a softness and vividness, a freshness and fragrance about her that words cannot describe.

At the end of three years the lovely Helena, then more lovely than ever, was told that her betrothal and marriage to Count Perowsky must now be celebrated. She knew but little of Perowsky, and what she knew she did not like. A fast young nobleman of the Calmuck-Tartar type, insincere countenance, and oblique, shifty eyes ; a young man of tandems, bull-dogs, betting and boxing ; of monster cigars, deep potations, questionable tastes and doubtful manners ; dress and address alike supposed to be English—Anglomaniæ representing the latest fashionable craze in the circles he chiefly frequented.

She asked her mother if some other arrangement could not be made ? She scarcely expected a favourable answer. The question was hardly worth asking. She did not dream of choosing for herself ; she did not ask for love. That, she supposed, like so many other

bright and beautiful things—legends and lives of the saints, miracles and marvels—existed only in books, as a thing of the imagination; but she thought perhaps someone more suitable could be found—someone who swore less, reeked less of wine, betted and wagered less, was less disposed to imitate the swagger of loud Americans or underbred Englishmen, and spent less money in a less questionable manner.

But she was told it ‘suited.’

She was told that a certain august Personage desired it; that young Perowsky, the chosen companion of one of the younger archdukes, was a *protégé* of the Emperor’s, who looked upon his escapades as mere ebullitions of youthful folly, and would gladly see the volatile young nobleman settled, ranged, *posé*, by a suitable marriage, in order that He might, thereafter, testify His good-will to the young man in a substantial form.

Traditions of obedience led Helena, both as a daughter and as a subject, to obey. The Imperial family, to its remotest archducal branches, each after its kind, sent her magnificent presents. Society *fêted* her, and the Czar signified His intention of honouring the occasion of her marriage by His presence.

Anyone who has lived at even the smallest of Courts, will readily understand that the young couple were regarded with envious eyes, and that for the bride-elect there was no possibility of escape.

The atmosphere of Courts is fatal to individual independence. The tone which prevails is necessarily one of extreme devotion ; plain-speaking is impossible, unless by special invitation ; and even then it is a perilous experiment. The frankest and least servile soul, breathing the general atmosphere of scrupulous submission, inhales something of the polite poison, and insensibly the character becomes more or less invertebrate. He who, in such an atmosphere, seeks to save something of his individuality and independence, is looked upon as an uncivilised ruffian ; averted eyes, cold shoulders, curt replies, tell him of his mistake, and mark the disapproval which politeness refrains from pronouncing.

It is true that a feeling of pain, not unmingled with surprise, was for a time Helena's predominant sentiment. The Sovereign had looked on her with such kindly eyes, had said so many gracious and flattering things to her, that there seemed a contradiction in his impos-

ing so uncongenial a spouse upon her. But the habit of unquestioning obedience prevailed, and she made no sign. The ceremony took place in her father's palace, and was followed by a ball. The following day the Czar left St. Petersburg for a week's hunting, and the bride was taken by her bridegroom to one of his numerous country estates.

At the wedding everyone had remarked the extraordinary emotion with which the Czar had followed the marriage ceremonial. By some it was attributed to personal reminiscences; others declared that young Count Perowsky, being the ringleader of a band of boon companions of one of the Imperial Grand Dukes, the Czar had promoted this alliance in order to cut short His own son's scandalous existence; and it was asserted that He lived in fear lest Perowsky, in the folly and exultation consequent on having secured the loveliest lady at Court for his bride, might not betray the history of past bachelor riotings and escapades, or at the last moment implicate the Grand Duke, his quondam boon companion, so as to outrage even the very elastic proprieties of the Imperial Court.

Helena looked grave, pale, and composed.

As innocent as, but less frolicsome than, the typical *ingénue*, she saw in the marriage a social arrangement by which two families were enabled to represent and consolidate wealth and power, community of interest, and unity of aim, combined with undying fidelity to the Sovereign.

She had no regrets on the score of love: she did not like leaving her mother, and the nursery and school-room, full of little sisters. Still, she did not doubt but that she could pursue her ideals as uninterruptedly as ever; that she would be permitted in a *dilettante* way to look after the peasants on her husband's estates, a little *à l'Anglaise*; that she might continue her studies in English history and poetry, on the plan recommended by her late governess. 'Are we far from Katchaloff?' she asked her bridegroom, as they drove up to the door of their country-house.

They had not been alone together until—after the wedding ball and an early *déjeuner*—she entered the travelling-carriage which was to take them to their destination.

Before she had settled herself comfortably in her furs, and coaxed her little pet dog to sleep upon her knees, a loud snore told her

that her lord and master had dispensed with further ceremony. With a look of disgust in his direction, she applied herself to the scenery. Some vague idea that rough and boisterous caresses might have been the unwelcome alternative, glanced across her mind, and made her temporarily grateful for the unceremonious somnolence of her life-companion. But, to do him justice, Paul Perowsky had no such familiar intentions.

Hitherto his attentions to the female sex had been exclusively confined to the venal and the vulgar. He did not know how to address a lady, nor could he imagine how any man, worthy the name, could be mean-spirited enough to succumb to the airs of affected fastidiousness, the assumptions and exactions of fanciful women.

The stopping of the carriage, the barking of dogs, the question, 'Are we far from Katchaloff?' roused the bridegroom from his four hours' uninterrupted slumber.

'Katchaloff? What do you know, why do you want to know, about Katchaloff?' he asked gruffly. 'We are at Semonow, now.'

'I know what everyone knows; that His Imperial Majesty has a hunting lodge at

Katchaloff, and that He went there from the ball, for a week's shooting.'

'Then you know more than I do.'

The vast, dreary, uninhabited building to which, as representing a home, the young reprobate had brought his bride, was melancholy enough of aspect to depress anyone, even though of the most cheerful temperament. But there had been little choice in the matter. Great possessions, titles, wealth and estates do not in Russia presuppose a 'castle,' or 'court,' or 'lodge,' or 'manor house,' as they do in England, and in a minor degree, in other European countries.

Count Perowsky was that young Russian nobleman whose words have often been quoted, when—in reply to some remark as to the extent of his possessions—he replied that he knew nothing about it, as they were managed by an agent, adding: '*Pourtant on dit que j'ai de superbes terres du côté de Tomsk.*'

As it was, Helena's high courage and proud self-command were nearly failing her under a sickening sense of terror and loneliness.

The crowd of rough unkempt retainers in the courtyard, the baying and barking of the dogs—which not even the whip of the overseer

could quell—the monotonous melancholy of the blank frontage, unbroken by one friendly or familiar face, the unpainted window frames, with here and there a broken pane of glass, the shattered fragments still lying on the unswept flagstones, between the crevices of which the seeding grasses grew high and rank, the grey decline of a cloudy day, and the remoteness and loneliness of the place, rendered it a matter of effort for Helena to smile graciously and try to look pleased, when the wild horde pressed about her, kissing her hands, her shoes, the hem of her dress and of her travelling-cloak, calling her '*Barina*,' 'princess,' 'little mother,' 'saint,' 'little mistress.'

It is true that since the emancipation (at which epoch a certain number of serfs were chosen by the landed proprietors to fulfil household functions), the *Dvorovie*, or domestic servants, who received their liberty but were not allotted portions of land, were not expected to do more than salute the *Barina* respectfully, as house-servants engaged by the year; but this was a special occasion, and the labourers on the estates had joined the *Dvorovie* in welcoming the bride and bridegroom. Helena bore up bravely, smiling in response to the

uncouth reception, until, with a sudden movement, her husband snatched a long-thonged whip from the kennel-master's hands, lashing the group immediately within thong's range unmercifully. A dull howl of mingled rage and pain, a menacing animal protest, as of dumb brute indignation, struck a terrible note of warning in Helena's breast. At that moment she would have given all she possessed, to see the wanton tyrant beside her receive retributive castigation at the hands of one of his infuriated victims. Her contempt for this uncalled-for act of cruelty brought a frown to her fair brow; and, where passive resignation had hitherto prevailed, an intense and active sense of repulsion rose rebellious in her bosom.

‘Why do you do that?’ she asked; ‘the poor people mean no harm. Why beat them like dogs?’

‘Dogs? They haven’t half the manner of dogs. Curse them! Dogs, if they are permitted to live, are licked into form!’

Then she had walked away, not hiding, nor attempting to hide all the scorn she felt for this boorish lout of a nobleman.

A kind of major-domo, in black, with elaborate manners and an unpleasant, impassive

face, led the way. The labyrinthine passages gave Helena a prison-like feeling as they passed many closed doors in their silent progress. Presently the German intendant threw open a suite of rooms, luxuriously furnished.

'These are the Countess's own apartments,' he said, obsequiously. 'I hope the gracious lady is satisfied?'

'Perfectly. Be so good as to tell the people to send my maid to me when she arrives. And stay! Tell the Count I shall rest until dinner-time.'

At dinner it appeared that the advent of the maid might be indefinitely delayed. The carriage containing her had broken down, and there was a difficulty as to repairs. The nearest smithy was a shed six miles away from the scene of the accident.

Helena was now greatly discomposed. The maid who, in childhood, had been her nurse, was selected by her mother as a staid, trustworthy person, to form the last responsible link with home; to mitigate the young bride's sense of loneliness, which the presence of a stranger would painfully have completed.

'What am I to do?' the Countess asked.

'Katharina can attend on you. Katharina's

a jolly little girl, better than nine-tenths of your fine-lady *femmes de chambre*.'

To this Helena made no reply. But when she withdrew, and the major-domo's daughter, practised in the pert familiar airs, as it seemed, of the *soubrette* of the comic opera, came up to offer assistance, her mistress instinctively shrank from the too free touch, and chartered impertinence of her bold black-eyed attendant.

'You can go,' she said. Then, a sudden terror of loneliness overcoming her pride, she added, quickly, 'that is, when you have shown me the Count's apartments;' and, walking to the window, she drew aside the heavy curtains.

'The bachelor suite, madame, is in an eastern wing, which you cannot see from here. The new suite of rooms have been furnished, and are on the other side of the ante-room which leads into this suite; but I heard our lord the Count say the keys of both were to be given to him, so'—with a hateful grimace—'the gracious lady may have some difficulty in knowing where to find him.'

As Helena felt, she scarcely knew whether, in case of need, she would call her husband to her aid, or apply to others for protection as against him. She determined, at any rate, not

to go to bed ; and, turning up the lamp, she drew an easy chair to the table, and sat down to read. It might be that her own maid would arrive before daylight, and, if so, her mistress would be the first to welcome her.

By degrees the familiar signs and sounds of daily life abated. Doors ceased to slam ; lights were extinguished ; profound stillness settled down upon the house and its belongings. Once it seemed to her that distant wheels were approaching ; but the soil was sandy, the turf, over which everyone recklessly drove, would deaden sound, and imagination might be only counterfeiting the arrival of the belated traveller.

Her highly-strung nerves were startled in the midst of the most intense silence, by the sound of a distant door slamming. She laid her book down upon her knees and waited.

The room, which had been lit with many candles on her entrance, was now nearly dark. A lamp burned on the table at her side ; she had caused the candles to be extinguished in her boudoir. Those in the bedroom beyond were still alight ; and through the open door she could see the pale blue satin bed-hangings, and large cheval glass. On the wall opposite

was an unframed mirror let into the panelling, but the room, being in shadow, except under the immediate circle of light caused by the lamp-shade, the eye was not attracted to, nor were objects clearly reflected in, its brilliant surface.

Suddenly, as she sat looking and listening, her hearing morbidly alive to every sound, it seemed as if she heard her own name pronounced. Unwilling to be the fool of Fancy she braced her nerves, by yet another effort, to disbelief; she told herself it was mere imagination. But—just as she had succeeded in persuading herself—she heard a voice whispering her name.

‘ Helena ! ’

Deprecatingly, appealingly, remonstratively—so it seemed to her—the familiar syllables formed themselves into a melancholy ghostlike echo. ‘ Helena ! ’

Who knew her name here? In this vast, lonely building, who could so call her? Was it some spirit-token? or was it some practical joke? If so, the jesters should not be gratified at her expense. She would betray no fear. Yet, as she formed the resolution, and was about to resume her interrupted

studies, again the voice, softly calling ‘Helena!’ arrested her purpose.

She had been looking towards the door of her bedroom, forgetting that, masked by a tapestry *portière*, there was also a door behind her. But now some confused movement attracted her gaze to the looking-glass panel, and she was startled out of her well-preserved composure by finding herself face to face with the Emperor.

Rising instinctively to her feet she advanced to meet the apparition, but her progress was checked by the looking-glass. Then she understood that the person intruding was, in reality, behind her, reflected only in the unframed mirror.

As she turned, pale with terror, to confront her midnight visitor, the apparition dropped the tapestry over the door, and the Sovereign, in person, stood before her.

‘Helena!’ he said again, this time in no whisper, in accents which she knew only too well; ‘Helena! It is I, the Emperor; have no fear.’

‘Your Imperial Majesty here, at this hour, unattended, unexpected! What does it mean? What am I to think, Sire?’

‘Think the truth.’

‘The truth, Sire, must mean danger, sudden and secret. So much I can guess, if I cannot guess the details. Our loyalty and fidelity cause your Imperial Majesty to place gracious confidence in us and to entrust your personal safety to our keeping. So much I understand as a matter of course. But——’

She spoke in the conventional tones of deep and devoted respect. ‘We,’ ‘our,’ hard as the words were to form, she forced her rebellious tongue to utter them glibly.

‘“We,” “our”; is it really then come to that? Have you been able to identify yourself with your husband so soon, so terribly soon?’ asked the Emperor in a tone of tender reproach.

‘I thought, Sire, I meant—that is, the well-known devotion of my father’s house, the loyalty and love in which we have been trained——’

And she stammered, confused, uneasy, and dismayed at the novelty of the situation. Personal fear she had none. She stood, as a subject, awaiting the Sovereign’s commands.

‘Loyalty and love,’ repeated the Emperor, in melancholy tones. ‘Ah! Helena, the last

word includes the first, with bliss added to duty.' Then, seeing her startled and astonished aspect, he went on: 'And that is all? You have guessed nothing of my anguish? Is it possible you have never divined the agony of love and despair with which I saw your young beauty sacrificed, where I, the high-priest of that sacrifice, assisted at it, and yet made no sign?'

Helena, deadly pale—suppressed emotion almost suffocating her—moved a step aside.

'Why, then, was the sacrifice made? What does it all mean?' she asked, her face scared and anxious, her eyes dilated, her lips pale and trembling.

'It means that black and bitter tongues were sullyng your fair fame. It means that miscreants, who do not dream, who have not capacity, themselves, for suffering the slow torture of long-suppressed tenderness, and the anguish of a solitary life, had discovered my secret, and had ventured to sully with the breath of scandal your maiden purity and honour.'

The pale loveliness—which, despite his pre-occupation, he could not help thinking, made her in her white robes ready for the sacrifice—

like an Iphigenia, turned into a ghastly pallor, but still she held up bravely.

‘No one,’ she said, proudly, ‘could traduce me so vilely. What have I ever done to make an enemy? It is a mistake, Sire; it cannot be.’

‘Alas! my child, what have you done? Are you not lovely? And is not the very tribute paid to worth and beauty, more than envious souls can bear? A glass breathed upon is sullied. A rough touch destroys the peach’s bloom; the purple of the grape will bear no handling. No explanations, no denials, avail in certain cases. The less said the better. There is nothing for it but to act, and to act promptly. Your parents saw it as I did—hence your hasty marriage.’

‘My hateful, unnecessary, cruel, hopeless marriage!’ she cried, bitterly.

It was the first word of self she had spoken.

‘Yes; but marriage gives you freedom; marriage will silence the slanderers.’

‘I could have gone into a convent.’

‘And have you, then, no pity for me?’ cried the Emperor. ‘Do you know what it is, can you understand what it means, to be lonely and loveless, without a friend, without a single

aspiration of your soul gratified or fulfilled ? The sickening round of so-called pleasure, the deadening round of endless duty, the eternal self-same monotony of splendour and weariness ! Why, since that first hour I saw you, Helena, my whole soul has been wholly, solely, and absolutely yours. I guarded my lips and eyes, to speak and look no praise that spies might turn to your disadvantage. I endured the sight of you, surrounded by admirers and flatterers, and I kept at a distance, and never breathed a word of the torments of love and jealousy that were distracting my soul and embittering my existence. At the risk of your despising me, Helena, I confess that there have been moments when I have even thought of laying aside the sceptre and taking off the crown, and thus escaping all the intolerable burthens which Government binds upon the soul, of entreating you to fly with me to some refuge, where we might live a simple life of love and rational occupation—a life of calm domestic bliss, a life of sheltered privacy, untroubled with the cares of State, untrammelled by the trappings of office. But I dared not approach you ; your spotless purity awed my unhappy passion into silence, so that the very words of my wilder

moments died unframed and unspoken upon my lips.'

'Your Imperial Majesty might have spared me this marriage.'

'I could not.'

'Or at least have given me a husband I could respect.'

'Respect and—love. No, Helena! that, too, I could not. That was beyond me. No man, loving a woman as I love you, could do that. But, in truth, I have given you liberty, and the trammels are merely nominal. You are henceforth absolutely your own mistress.'

'And Count Perowsky?'

'Count Perowsky, after misleading One who as the son of his sovereign should have been sacred to him, after ruining himself with gambling and sycophants, with rioting and wastefulness, has put himself beyond the pale, by appropriating Government funds to a very large amount. I intervened between him and ruin. I hold his life in the palm of my hand. I have but to put down my finger to crush him. But I abstain for your sake, and for yours only. He is reduced to the nonentity of absolute slavery. He lives, but he only exists; and he knows on what tenure—as the tool that shall

be needful to the skilled workman. He dare not move a hand or foot, he dare not say his soul is his own. He is a mere Thing. Nor will he dare to deviate, by so much as a hair's-breadth, from the contract that binds him. The world thinks him only a foolish young fellow who has sown his wild oats, but who now will "range" himself on virtue's side, and turn over a new leaf. You and he will remain strangers. If he ever approaches you with familiarity or insolence, if he dares to make your will subservient to his own, you have but to lift up your finger and he shall be removed from your path. Nay, do not shrink. I do not mean murder. There are a thousand ways. Power has its privileges. The Governorship of a distant province; leave to travel; the honourable exile of a foreign Embassy, an Appointment *outré mer*. Meanwhile, yesterday's ceremony has silenced scandal. You are established. You are absolute mistress of yourself and your own actions. I witnessed the ceremony without blanching. O Helena! what have I not endured for your sake? At least, say that the news I bring you is welcome! Say that you are glad to be free!

‘And M. de Perowsky?’ Helena asked again.

‘He knows that I am here, to see if he has carried out his compact. He was informed of the hour of my coming; when I leave he will know that you know all.’

‘And do you think, Sire, you who are so anxious for my reputation, that it will conduce to my honour if the story of to-night—the history of my marriage—should creep into certain circles and be circulated in society?’

‘It will not. It cannot. Precautions were taken that your own personal maid should be detained *en route*. It was necessary that I should see you, alone, untrammelled; that I should explain the situation to you, and prove to you, conclusively, that you had nothing to fear. The people hereabouts are, for the most part, little other than barbarians; the few who could tattle or gossip—dare not.’

‘I had no cause, Sire, to be afraid.’

‘But reassurance is better than doubt. You might have been doubtful. The situation is at least exceptional. I needed reassurance myself. A man, with a heart in his body, would risk ruin, disgrace, even death itself, for a woman like you. But this craven hound has kept his

word,—and will ! The suite of rooms through which I entered are supposed to be his ; but they are really mine. And yet voluntarily, Helena,—without a word, without a petition, a hinted reproach, or an expression of vexation from you,—I promise never, after to-night, to intrude upon your privacy without an express permission. This once, it was necessary. I had to convince myself that the compact was conscientiously fulfilled ; I had to lighten your heart of half its heavy burden.'

'Your Imperial Majesty has taken my fate, my life, my destiny into your keeping.'

'Is it worse that they should be in my keeping than in his ? Reflect. I have given you Liberty, and established your reputation.'

'But at what a cost !'

'And that is all you have to say to me ?—Helena, have a little pity on my loneliness and despair ; have a word of kindness for One who throws himself on your generosity. Look at me. The dead are not more cold, than the woman I wedded in my youth is to me. My uncles and cousins squander and intrigue, and bring obloquy on me, and in the eyes of the world I have to endorse their base actions, and appear to approve their scandalous lives. My

children are rebellious, extravagant, headstrong, and ungrateful. They have no sense of duty ; yet them, too, I must seem to justify, and approve. I, whose heart is overflowing with tenderness towards the whole human race, with whom the Enthusiasm of Humanity is a passion rather than a principle, who hate war and look on all official slaughter as an anachronism ; I, who would gladly die in the service of my country, who,—born in a private station, might have figured as a philanthropic fanatic—I am a mere puppet, forced by circumstances too strong for me, to acquiesce in the wrong-doing of others ; driven by causes overwhelmingly powerful in their effects, to act in direct contradiction to my distinct convictions ! I long in my loneliness for the voice of a friend, for the sympathy of an equal, for the encouragement of a fellow-mind. And what have I ? What am I ? An Emperor, yet a lonely wretch ; beggared of love and affection, world-weary, heart-hungry and soul-sick, who begs for a cup of water and a crust of bread in love's name, and gets, in reply, a serpent and a stone. O Helena, say at least that you pity, if you cannot love me !'

‘Sire, I respect you, and your sorrows.

I am your loyal and obedient servant and subject.'

And she knelt at his feet and kissed his hand.

'Be my friend, my guide, my counsellor, my Egeria, whose gentle wisdom shall effect her country's good?' cried the Emperor, raising her in a transport of enthusiasm.

'Sire, my ambitions do not lie in that direction. I would suggest that it were a gracious act now to leave me alone.'

'Farewell, Helena, since you will it so. Your noble confidence in me shall never be betrayed. A woman less single-minded, less absolutely and stainlessly pure, might have counterfeited the calm confidence which you have really felt, yet not have had the cruel courage to drive me away. And now, Good-night!'

According to wont and use, she again bent low, but the Emperor raised her, and lightly touching her forehead with his lips, as a father might have done, he passed through the door by which he came, without another word.

At the *déjeûner* served to Count Perowsky and his bride the following day, when the

servants had withdrawn a short dialogue took place between the young couple.

‘I hope you passed an agreeable night, madame.’

‘A most sad and terrible night; for, as you probably know, the peril in which you live was totally unsuspected by me.’

‘Be easy, madame. Spare your pity. As I shall not be led into temptation, the peril to which you allude is purely imaginary.’

This with supercilious insolence.

‘There is peril even in insolence,’ Helena replied. ‘Though I may not complain of it, there is the chance of its being reported; for, in our unhappy country, everything is known.’

‘Yes. Damn the spies! However, we understand one another, madame, at last.’

‘I think you scarcely understand me,’ she said quietly. ‘But that is an ignorance which will be remedied by degrees.’

The ideal relationship which in his enthusiasm the Countess Perowsky’s Imperial lover had sketched with a flattering pencil was not destined to last.

From loyalty to love, the way is not long.

By pleading and tenderness, by submission and patience, the woman’s heart was won at

last. The Egeria of the fountain and the grove became the companion and close friend, the counsellor and fellow student, of the modern Numa.

How is it, then, that still in the zenith of her resplendent beauty Countess Helena Perowska is climbing the stairs of the Nihilist conspirator's obscure lodging ; in company with two women not less resolute than herself ?

It is difficult for the world at large to understand the life of courts, the intrigues of officials, the deadly *ennui* that eats into the very heart of all the gorgeous shams and empty shows, and renders null and void the hollow splendour of this glittering routine.

Helena had grown to passionately adore her Imperial protector.

Then had come a period of weakness and suffering, and the physicians who prescribed German baths declared that these must be supplemented by a winter in the South. She was longing for the early summer ; that would bring her back to all her heart held dear.

But in Helena's rooms in the Winter Palace a rival was installed—that rival a sister who, ten years before, had been her favourite pet and plaything in the nursery — full of rosebud

brothers and sisters—and who, now, at seventeen, was the living, breathing counterpart of what Helena herself had formerly been.

St. Petersburg gossips merely remarked, in comment, that ‘That family had ever been devoted to the pleasures of their Imperial masters.’ The men were all brave and the women all frail. Honours and emolument, dignities and powers, rewarded the valour and devotion, and perhaps the silence, of the men ; whilst the traditions of the past pledged the women to an acquiescence in all demands made upon them in the name of any member of that Imperial House, to which for generations they had been so profoundly attached.

Count Perowsky enjoyed at length full liberty to love his Countess, had he been so inclined, the tattlers declared.

But the thoughts of both took another direction, and the day for love’s young dream was past.

L’union fait la force, was their new motto ; but the union alluded to was not that of wedlock.

The man hated his Master, and was ready to denounce him as a Tyrant.

The remembrance of his own misconduct,

and the clemency which had reduced his functions to those of a tool, rankled within him.

The betrayed and outraged Woman in Helena thirsted for vengeance.

It was her turn to make use of Perowsky now; and he, for his part, was quite willing to be made use of.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.









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